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The Process of Mexican American Catholic School Selection

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The Process of Mexican American Catholic School Selection

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative multiple case study explored the process Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools for their children. Catholic school graduates become the leaders of the Catholic Church and society; and are replete with moral values resulting from the fostering of their faith while in Catholic schools. Their test scores and achievements outstrip those of their public-school counterparts, and their futures are bright as well (Berends, 2009; Dolan, 2010; Gautier, 2005). What about the futures of the 17.9 million Hispanic school aged children in the United States? In 2016, 55 million Hispanic people lived in the United States with 17.9 of their children being of school age (Patten, 2016). Of those children, only 307,664 attended Catholic schools (McDonald and Schultz, 2016). Emerging from this data is the problem that few Hispanic children are enrolled in Catholic schools. This study sought to understand the process used by Hispanic Mexican American parents whose children attended Catholic schools to develop a conduit by which more Hispanic children could attend Catholic schools in the future.

Data for this study came from interviews of six Mexican American married couples with their, first born, children enrolled in a Catholic prekindergarten or kindergarten in a Catholic diocese in the Southern region of the United States. Content analysis was used as a means of data analysis. Content analysis is a method that is both systematic and objective, as a means of describing... phenomena (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The data were also examined using a modified constant comparison method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1963). The theoretical framework of the study was derived and modified from the rational choice model of Friedman

and Hechter (1988), which described the process of school selection consisting of four major constructs: *who chooses*; *the gathering and use of information*; *negotiated actions*; and *the aggregation mechanism*.

The study found that Mexican American parents undertake an informal process of school selection, different from the school selection studies found in the literature and the theoretical framework of the study. The study also found that Mexican American mothers direct the process of school selection, are often predisposed to sending their children to Catholic schools and lead their husbands towards the Catholic school selection as well, consistent with the literature of “who chooses”. However, grandmothers are also involved. In making the decision about selecting Catholic schools, Mexican American parents avail themselves of little information, including from the Internet. They also make a single Catholic school selection versus choosing two or three schools. Mexican American parents consider any negotiations that take place as conversations and due to selecting a single school, these conversations most often are limited to scarcity of resources and convincing fathers of the virtues of Catholic schools. Mexican American parents, who find it difficult to pay tuition costs, nevertheless, decide to send their children, contrary to popular opinion. Mexican American parents gather most of their school information during their visit to the school and cite the actual visit with the school principal as the most critical factor in the process of selecting the Catholic schools for their children. The results of this study identify steps that can be taken by educators, dioceses and policy makers in response to the problem of too few Hispanic children in Catholic schools.

This dissertation by Gilbert L. Sáenz fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Catholic Educational Leadership approved by Merylann J. Schuttloffel, Ph.D., as Director, and by Rona Frederick, Ph.D. and John J. Convey, Ph.D. as Readers.

Merylann J. Schuttloffel, Ph.D., Director

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to: my parents Felix Sáenz Cisneros and Maria del Carmen Sáenz Larrasquitu; my children Katherine Arlette and Alejandra Patricia; and wife Patricia Lucia Sáenz Morales. This dissertation study is also dedicated to William Samelson, Ph.D.

My father was an honorable and honest man who worked extremely hard all his life. He was an example of total dedication to his family of nine children. My mother was an example of beauty, intelligence, faithfulness and dedication to her husband and children; an example of self-sacrifice. Both my mother and father understood that life was founded on the concept of hard work, dedication to family and an unrelenting faith. Education was also something they stressed; a means of transforming poverty into opportunity. Among many personal triumphs, they held the obtaining of university degrees for their children, as a major accomplishment. They taught us that education was essential if we were to achieve more than they and if our children were to achieve more than we.

Our children, Arlette and Alex, have always been at the core of our essence. To have purpose and meaning in life has always been about raising them as our parents raised us, so that they might be good people and have faith at the center of their hearts. I pray for God's blessings upon them: that they are happy and that their faith propels them to all that is good and wholesome. There have been so many reasons to love them; but too little space to retell the story of their inspiration. Suffice to say that they have always been the pride of our eyes and the fulfillment of love in our hearts.

My wife, Patricia, has been at the center of my life for many, many years. I met her when I was seventeen while conducting a retreat for her theology class in an all-girls Catholic school; a true example of God's providence. From that day forward and for the last forty-three years, she has epitomized the example of beauty, faithfulness, intelligence, honesty and dedication to ensuring that our faith be at the center of our lives. She has raised our children with a total gift of self and a real desire that they become all that they could become. My love for her has never wavered because I knew that it was God's providence that brought us together and that our vows provided us the Grace under which to live and love.

I also dedicate this dissertation to William Samelson, PhD, a friend and a holocaust survivor, who gave me strength and hope to continue this research study when doubts crept in.

Lastly, I dedicate this study to Our Lady of Guadalupe and ask our Lord to take this work and bring good to others. Amen!

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The Process of Mexican American Catholic School Selection

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Catholic schools are a treasure to the Catholic Church and to the nation (Hamilton, 2008). They are successful spiritually, academically and communally; and their graduates become lifelong practitioners of their faith. These graduates also become the leaders of the Catholic Church and society; and are replete with moral values resulting from the fostering of their faith from parents and while in Catholic schools. Their test scores and achievements outstrip those of their public-school counterparts, and their futures are bright as well (Berends, 2009; Dolan, 2010; Gautier, 2005).

What are not as bright are the futures of many of the 17.9 million Hispanic school-aged children in the United States (Patten, 2016). There are 55 million Hispanics living in the United States today, of which 55% self-identify as Catholic and comprise 42% of the Catholic population (Funk & Martinez, 2014; Krogstad & Lopez, 2015a, Patten, 2016). However, only 1.7% of Hispanic school aged children attend Catholic schools (Patten, 2016; McDonald & Schultz, 2016). The problem that emerges is that there are few Hispanic children attending Catholic schools. The Catholic University of America professor John Convey opined, “The growing Latino population, almost all of which is Catholic and currently underrepresented in our Catholic schools, is also of concern to the church and its future. The church must make a greater effort to provide meaningful experiences for Hispanic Catholics (and to) enroll their children in Catholic schools” (Convey, 2010, p 5). This is significant because the Catholic

Hispanic population today constitutes 42% of all Catholics in the United States; soon to be a majority of all Catholic faithful in the United States.

Catholic schools provide good academic results and many parents sense that “Catholic school(s) might help their children develop self-discipline, moral resilience and spiritual maturity; a gateway to adulthood” (Grace, 2002, P. 3). Additionally, when examining the upward mobility of children, research on lifetime inequality indicates that, by age 20, lifetime earnings and wealth are often set. Little that happens over the course of their lifetime will affect Hispanic children more than which school they attend and the decisions they make soon thereafter (Hao & Pong, 2008). It is imperative to understand the process used by Hispanic parents whose children attend Catholic school to provide a conduit where more Hispanic children can attend Catholic schools and where the future of Hispanic children might be brighter.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Catholic immigrants of Irish descent were believed to be outcasts (Daniels, 2010). Four and a half million Irish immigrants became 40 million Irish Americans over the course of half a century (Hout & Goldstein, 1994). They came from poor and working class families. With strong clerical expectations that Catholic parents send their children to Catholic schools, many of these immigrants found refuge in the Catholic Church, as they sent their children to Catholic schools. As early as 1884, the bishops of the United States decreed that a Catholic school be built next to every Catholic parish in the United States. Thus, immigrant children attended Catholic schools, and many forged successful futures (Rapple, 2015). Greeley and Rossi (1966), reported that, in the interceding 60 years, from the end of the nineteenth century to 1960, Catholic immigrants achieved a social standing in American ahead of Protestants and second only to the Jewish population (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993).

In biblical times, the poor, humbled and afflicted were called the *anawim* of society (Brown, 1999). Today, the *anawim* of society are still the poor, humbled and afflicted. However, instead of being Irish, Italian, or Polish or as in the beginning of the twentieth century, today, they are Hispanic. In 2002, 63% of the Hispanic population were 1st generation immigrants, were economically disadvantaged and lagged in educational attainment when compared to their non-Hispanic counterparts (Pew, 2004). The Pew Research Center identifies 1st generation immigrants as individuals living in the United States who are foreign-born (Passel & Cohn, 2008).

Whereas early immigrants found work without a high school diploma in hand, today, a college education is paramount for stable employment and any hope for future advancement. Today, the children of immigrant Hispanics are at a disadvantage as they transverse the public schools; unprepared due to accumulated disadvantages facing them. Despite the benefits of Catholic schools, many Hispanics are unable to access them as costs continue to be a barrier (Louie & Holdaway, 2009).

What results is that 1st generation parents are unable to help their children move up the class rank in one generation. Historically, 1st generation immigrants that started at the bottom, climbed their way to a better lot. This has been the American immigrant story and parents have always expected a better life for their children (Pearlman, 2005). There is a question today whether the American dream can provide immigrants and their descendants, an assurance of the American dream. Additionally, it must be noted that when speaking of Hispanics, not all Hispanics in the United States are immigrants and first generation. The US Census shows that first-generation Americans comprise 35.7% of all Hispanics; 31% comprise second-generation and 33.3% comprise third-generation (US Census, 2012). Providing Catholic school access to

all Hispanics, could help generations of children avail themselves of better schooling, graduation, college access, better employment and an ability to move up the class rank; not for the sake of status but rather an improvement for the lives of their Hispanic children. It is therefore helpful to understand the process used by Hispanic parents in selecting Catholic schools so that Catholic schools can provide the nexus to help Hispanic children, as they did for immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century, reach the social standing necessary to be equal in the sphere of American society and education (USCCB, 2012, 2005).

This qualitative multiple case study, sought to explore and understand the process used by Hispanic parents who have chosen Catholic schools for their children. The purpose of the exploration was to better understand, to provide answers to the problem of few Hispanic children in Catholic schools and to provide a nexus for their future enrollment. It is imperative so that Hispanic children attend and graduate from Catholic schools and enroll in the college or university of their choice. This will improve their future and solidify their participation in the Catholic Church as articulated by Dolan (2010).

Background of the Study

Each year across the United States, parents engage in a deliberate process of school selection that concludes with a decision of which school their children will attend, including Catholic schools. There are 6,525 Catholic schools; among which 5,325 are elementary schools and 1,200 are secondary (McDonald & Schultz, 2016). Parents choose Catholic schools so that their children can experience more of their Catholic faith, a sense of community, service to others, and academic excellence (Kurtz, 2015). As primary educators of their children, parents take their role in choosing a school seriously and purposefully (Educationis, G., 1965). Much is known about what attracts parents to Catholic schools and why parents choose them (Gill,

Timpane, Ross, & Brewer, 2001). Also known is why Hispanic parents do not enroll their children in Catholic schools (Guzman, Palacios, & Deliyannides, 2012). However, what is not readily known is about the process used by Hispanic parents, in the selection of Catholic schools for their children (Hamilton & Guin, 2005). This was the focus of this study.

The reasons that few Hispanic children attend Catholic schools are many. Hispanic parents consider Catholic schools as prohibitive and expensive. Additionally, the circumstances of accumulated disadvantages affecting Hispanic families may not provide the means, by which to consider Catholic schools. Hispanic parents also perceive that, since Catholic schools require parents to volunteer and public schools are free, public schools are more accessible than Catholic schools (Guzman et al., 2012).

Accumulated disadvantages are a reality that creates conditions causing many Hispanic children not to enroll in Catholic schools. Among these accumulated disadvantages are parental immigrant status, economic standing, and their lack of knowing how to transcend the country's educational system. This sub-culture evolves and affects future opportunities affecting stable employment and economic success (Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). In 2016, 307,654 Hispanic children attended Catholic schools and many of them did so with the financial help of the school or parish (McDonald and Schultz, 2016). Juxtapositioned with these Hispanic families, are those 1.6 million Hispanic households in the United States earning \$100,000 or more (Garoogian, 2013, p. 1630) who can send their children to Catholic schools and don't. Many Hispanics are unable to afford Catholic schools while many others can afford but do not. A solution must be found to the problem of too few Hispanics enrolled in Catholic schools.

For Hispanic students, the public system of education perpetuates high dropout rates, low college admissions, and a broadening of the achievement gap (Gandara, & Contreras, 2009).

“Public education has failed to deliver the promise of a quality education for Hispanics” (USCCB, 2004, p. 62). The incoming inequalities of school systems, originating from native country school systems, are not providing the necessary skills with which children can learn to read and write. In Mexico, of the 114 million inhabitants, 74 million are between the ages of 15 and 64. Of those, 43% are undereducated, unable to read and have not completed elementary or secondary school (Anton, 2016). This does not bode well for those who have immigrated over the last 20 years, either. Two solutions to the problem of the undereducated Hispanic population in the United States is to find ways in which Hispanic parents can avail themselves of a Catholic education for their children and for Catholic educators and policy makers to better understand the process Hispanic parents use to select Catholic schools for their children, so that they might make Catholic schools more Hispanic friendly. In finding solutions, parents, children, and Catholic schools will benefit, and Hispanic children will have an opportunity to embrace a future filled with hope and opportunity.

Statement of the Problem

The Hispanic population in the United States grew from 35.3 million to 50.3 million between 2000 and 2010, a 43% increase over the decade (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011) and has reached 55 million, today (Funk & Martinez, 2014; Krogstad & Lopez, 2015a, Patten, 2016). Of the 55 million Hispanics in the United States, 55% identify themselves as Catholic, and comprise 42% of the total Catholic population in the United States (Krogstad & Lopez, 2015a). Of the 55 million, 17.9 million are Hispanic school-aged children, with only 1.7% attending Catholic schools (Patten, 2016; McDonald and Schultz, 2016). The problem that emerges is that few Hispanic children attend Catholic schools.

Research Questions

The modified *rational choice theory model* (Friedman & Hechter, 1988) is the theoretical framework of this study and explains the processes used by many parents in selecting schools. The overarching concern this study sought to understand the process used by Mexican American parents in selecting Catholic schools for their children.

There are four basic constructs found in the literature and the Friedman and Hechter (1988) model of school selection. These are (1) *who decides*, (2) *the gathering and use of information*, (3) *the negotiations that take place during the process of school selection* and (4) *the aggregation mechanism*; defined as the separate actions of individuals leading to the production of a social outcome in what Friedman and Hechter (1988) call the aggregation mechanism. These constructs are captured in the theoretical framework of the study and form the basis of the research questions. It is from the literature, theoretical framework, that the researcher developed four research questions, whose purpose was to describe the process Mexican American parents use to select Catholic schools for their children.

The research questions of this study were as follows:

Overarching 1 – What is the process Mexican American parents use to select Catholic schools for their children?

Question 2 – Who chooses: Who is involved in the process Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools?

Question 3 – Gathering and use of information - What sources and types of information do Mexican American parents gather and use in the process of selecting Catholic schools?

Question 4 – Negotiated actions - What do the various points of negotiation Mexican American parents consider in selecting Catholic Schools?

Question 5 – The aggregation mechanism – What aggregation mechanism constructs do Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to describe the process used by Mexican American parents who have selected Catholic schools for their children. The process is defined by Freidman and Hechter (1988) as the separate actions of individuals combined to produce a social outcome; the selection of schools. The rational choice theory model (Friedman & Hechter, 1988) was the theoretical model used to study the process used by Mexican American parents selecting Catholic schools for their children. The model identifies who in the family decides, the various sources of information used and the various negotiated actions parents undertake leading to the selection of schools, described as the aggregation mechanism used by families.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant on several counts. The study filled the gap that exists in the literature about the process used by Mexican American parents in selecting Catholic schools for their children. As such, it described the sources and types of information are most influential in the selection process, the negotiated actions Mexican American parents undertake and who in the Mexican American family is most influential in making the final school selection. It also developed a better understanding of the process Mexican American parents used to select Catholic schools for their children. The study enables Catholic schools, episcopal leaders,

administrators, researchers, and policymakers to develop strategies that impact the recruitment for this segment of the Catholic population.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of the study was to describe the process used by Mexican American parents who have selected Catholic schools for their children. The process was defined by Freidman and Hechter (1988) and included the aggregation mechanism described as the separate actions of individuals combined to produce a social outcome, the selection of schools (Friedman & Hechter, 1988). The rational choice theory model (Friedman & Hechter, 1988) and the literature, was the theoretical framework used to describe the process used by Mexican American parents selecting Catholic schools for their children. The study identified the importance of parents as decision-makers, who decided, information sources and types used in parental decision-making; negotiated actions of parental decision-making; all describing the aggregation mechanism used by each family under consideration.

In summary, the rational choice theory model and the literature provided the framework for this study, which used four general constructs to explain the process used by parents in selecting schools for their children. In describing the aggregation mechanism, the process of school selection was better explained.

Parents as Decision Makers, Who Decides

Parents as decision makers were at the center of understanding who in the family leads the discussion and is most influential in making the decision of where the children will attend school. With the advent of many different forms of family: single, divorced or remarried, it becomes important to ascertain the dynamics of how decisions are made. In the review of literature, mothers often have the main responsibility for choosing schools for their children and

often consider what the children desire; especially in middle and secondary schools. Mothers more often do the legwork to find the information necessary to make an informed decision. Mothers of all social classes and family contexts are more involved in the decision than fathers are. In working-class families, children decide more than in other family groups (David, West and Ribbens, 1994). The study examined the process used by Mexican American parents and found similar findings; mothers are the primary source of school selection, fathers are confirmers and grandmothers are also involved.

The Gathering and Use of Information

The first construct in the rational choice theory model (Friedman & Hechter, 1988) involves the gathering of information identified as coming from various information sources, including information sent by the school containing testing data and school accomplishments, information gathered by speaking with teachers, friends, and family, and even information gathered by attending open houses. This information frames the various choices parents consider and those choices that become constricted and refined. The constricting and refining of choices comes when parents begin to use the information gathered and make preliminary selections based on that information. Studies have shown that the gathering of information is the most important step and key in the decision-making process (Bell, 2009; Friedman & Hechter, 1988; Galotti, 2002; Joshi, 2014). Information coming from the school is called cold knowledge. Information coming from people such as teachers, friends, or family is hot knowledge, often also called grapevine knowledge. The term grapevine refers to hearsay or just feedback from friends and parents. It can be information gathered while walking in the playground or listening to teachers and students who attend a school. It is information from these informal networks that influences decision-making the most. Grapevine and hot

knowledge are synonymous and define information originating with people, versus cold knowledge, as information from brochures and examination results. Parents use cold knowledge and hot knowledge to understand the school and to refine or constrict their initial choice selections. As parents lay out the information, they weigh the different choices before them and make preliminary decisions about which schools to consider; before continuing toward the process of negotiated actions. This study found that Mexican American families availed themselves of minimal information before making their Catholic schools selection.

Negotiated Actions

The second construct in the rational choice theory model of Friedman and Hechter (1988) involves three distinct aspects of negotiated actions. Negotiated actions include: *hierarchy of preferences; opportunity costs; and institutional constraints*. This step refines and constricts the choice parents make among schools.

Before information is sought, parents often develop an initial hierarchy of preferences; certain preferences or ideas about which schools they want their children to attend. These may include whether they want the children to attend all-boy or girl schools, schools in the neighborhood or even schools that they may have attended as children. These initial leanings then cause parents to only seek information about these schools. The information parents have gathered to this point affects these preferences. Because of the information parents have gathered, they begin to develop refine, expand or constrict these choices. These preferences then become the hierarchy of preferences that parents then use in selecting which schools to consider for their children and even visit.

These preferences are intentions at this point and become serious considerations when parents deliberate institutional other aspects of negotiated actions such as further constraints and

opportunity costs. When trying to select schools, the first constraint parents face is often *scarcity of resources*, which often prevents parents from selecting one school over another. Scarcity of resources may include finances, transportation or anything that may not permit parents to choose the school of their choice. Scarcity of resources often causes a sifting of the various schools under consideration. The costs involved in making one decision over another include tuition and distance, and social standing. Parents consider scarcity of resources in conjunction with opportunity costs. Opportunity costs lead to the examination of available choices and the cost of not choosing one school over the other. Because of a scarcity of resources, second choices are often considered, and the costs of future opportunities are examined considering the selection of the second choice over the first. Even when a scarcity of resources exists, parents often choose the first school because they are unwilling to forego the opportunities of the first choice over the second. The options available to parents once they vet scarcity of resources and opportunity costs become a part of the family's hierarchy of preferences. Institutional constraints then become a part of school vetting by parents. Institutional constraints are constructs that schools or parents consider in the vetting process of school selection. The construct of institutional constraints may include schools with a particular mission, schools admitting students from certain parishes or even schools that a coeducational or single gender. They construct also includes familial preferences, their religious beliefs, and the norms established by their social group. These constructs examined under negotiated actions further expand, refine or restrict decisions and help establish a framework through which to consider schools during the aggregation mechanism; the next construct in the process of school selection. The study found that Mexican American families call negotiations, conversations and

that scarcity of resources and convincing fathers of the virtues of Catholic schools were the two significant points of conversation.

The Aggregation Mechanism

The aggregation mechanism is the conceptualization of individual actions leading to an outcome. The aggregation mechanism is the primary focus of this study and provides answers to the question of how parents decide which Catholic schools to select for their children. The aggregation mechanism involves combining individual actions or decisions to produce a social outcome. Merging the construct of information and the construct of the negotiated actions are central in the process of expanding, refining or constricting parental selection. It is in the aggregation mechanism that the consultations, compromises, and conflicts that lie at the center of the choice process emerge.

Figure 1 describes a process of school selection. The solid arrows take parents from the gathering and use of information to negotiated actions leading them to a social outcome; the selection of schools. This study seeks to document and describe the aggregation mechanism of this process. Some variations of Friedman and Hechter's (1988) model distinguish other paths that parents may take. Some parents may take the information-preferences-outcome path while other parents may take the information-opportunity costs-outcome path, yet other parents may take the information-institutional constraints-outcome path to select schools for their children, or they may use all the above. By investigating the aggregation mechanism, the path used by Mexican American parents, who have chosen Catholic schools for their children, will emerge.

In summary, Figure 1 depicts the theoretical framework of the study. The rational choice theory model incorporates the constructs of who decides, information sources, negotiated actions leading to a description of the aggregation mechanism, which describes the process used

by parents in selecting schools for their children, to reach the outcome of school selection.

These same constructs are also those found in the literature about how parents select schools.

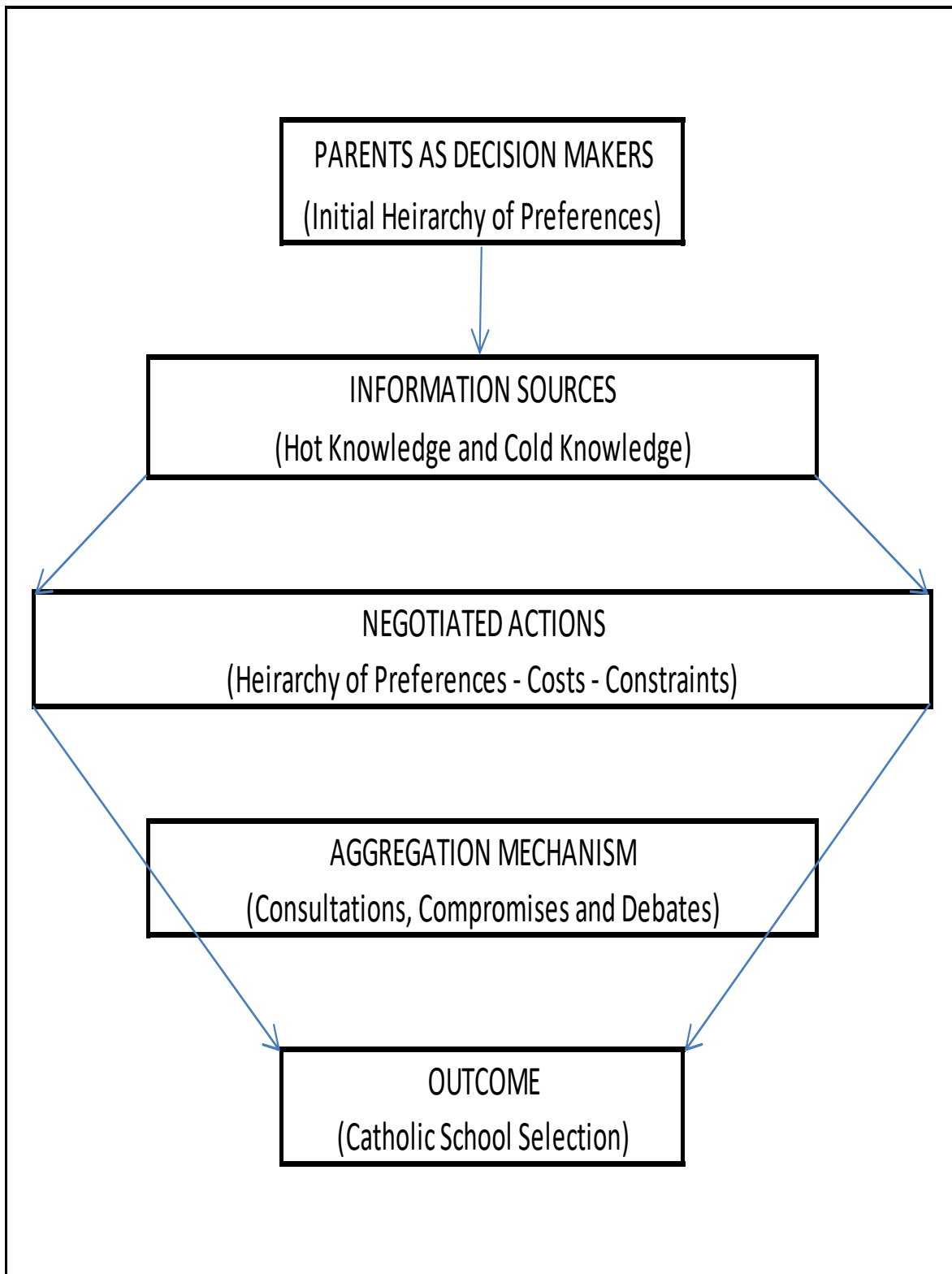


Figure 1: The decision-making process, adapted from Friedman and Hechter (1988). *The contribution of rational choice theory to macro-sociological research.*

Limitations

This study used a sample of six couples whose children were enrolled in Catholic school prekindergarten and kindergarten in the Southern region of the United States. The first limitation of the study was that only parents with students enrolled in prekindergarten and kindergarten took part in the study. The second limitation was that Mexican Americans was only Hispanic subgroup included due to the geographical location of the study. The third limitation was that this dissertation study was limited by the amount of time the university provided for its completion. The fourth limitation was that the study was retrospective versus a happening in real time.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used in the study:

Aggregation Mechanism - The process found in Friedman and Hechter (1988) used to process constructs associated with school selection by parents, leading to a social outcome.

Anawim – Name given to the poor, humbled and afflicted during biblical times.

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) – It is a national, non-profit, Georgetown University-affiliated research center that conducts social-scientific studies about the Catholic Church.

Catholic school - Catholic schools are maintained parochial schools or education ministries of the Catholic Church. The Church operates the world's largest non-governmental school system, which takes part in the evangelizing mission of the Church, integrating religious education as a core subject within the curriculum.

Catholic worldview - A Catholic worldview is a way of understanding reality considering the total truth about God, man, and the world (John Paul II).

Cold knowledge - Information that individuals use in deciding derived from brochures, official publications, and data.

Content analysis – It is a means of analysis that reduces qualitative data by making sense of a large volume of data to identify core consistencies and meanings (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Grapevine knowledge - Information gathered from social networks, including friends, parents of students at other schools, gossip, and sometimes unreliable places.

Hierarchy of preferences - A hierarchy of preferences represents the constructs that parents self-select and use in deciding.

Hispanic/Latino - Hispanic or Latino refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

Hot knowledge - Information derived from social networks, including friends, parents of students attending schools, or the grapevine used by parents in selecting schools for their children.

Institutional constraints - Constraints including social, religious, and cultural rules or expectations that parents consider in making choices about which school their children will attend.

Landscape of metaphor - A model used by some to describe a school selection process.

Lone-wolf households - Households led by single mothers.

NCEA - The National Catholic Educational Association is a volunteer association of Catholic educators and institutions.

Non-Catholic - A Non-Catholic person is one who is not a Roman Catholic but rather of another religion.

Rational choice theory - Rational choice theory is a framework for understanding and modeling social and economic behavior.

Religious school - A school whose focus and mission is the spreading of the faith.

USCCB - The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is an assembly of the hierarchy of the United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands that exercises certain pastoral functions on behalf of the Christian faithful of the United States. The purpose of the Conference is to promote the greater good that the Church offers humankind through programs of the apostolate adapted to the circumstances of time and place.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This dissertation study described the process used by Mexican American parents who have children enrolled in Catholic schools. The process included an aggregation mechanism described as the separate actions of individuals combined to produce a social outcome, the selection of schools. The Friedman & Hechter (1988) model of school selection offered the rational choice theory model that merged the various constructs found in the literature about the school selection process.

The problem statement articulated earlier identified Hispanic enrollment in Catholic schools as problematic, with few Hispanic children attending Catholic schools. In 2016, there were 307,654 Hispanic children attending Catholic schools, 1.7% of all Hispanic school-aged children (McDonald & Shultz, 2016; Patten, 2016; Stepler & Brown, 2016). With the majority of Hispanics (55%) being Catholic and 42% of Catholics identifying themselves as Hispanic (Funk & Martinez, 2014), the number of Hispanic children enrolled in Catholic schools should be higher. Research on Catholic schools in the United States is extensive and describes the effectiveness of Catholic schools and the challenges facing them (Bauman, 2002; Buddin, 2012; Chakrabarti & Roy, 2010; DeFiore, 2011; DeFiore, Convey, & Schuttloffel, 2009; Schuttloffel, 2012; Youniss & Convey, 2000).

What is not well established is how Hispanic parents go about deciding to send their children to Catholic schools and the process used by Mexican American parents in choosing Catholic schools for their children.

Overview

David, West & Ribbens (1994) conducted a seminal study on the process used by parents in selecting schools for their children. The focus of their study delimited the various aspects of parental decision-making. The study concluded that parents most often use a process when selecting schools for their children and that various constructs are involved, such as who decides, and the gathering and use of information; which has been identified as the most critical aspect in making a school selection. The major conclusion of the study was that families often established individual processes that were so complex, distinct and individualized that the authors could not extract a specific theory of school selection. These findings were consistent with other studies on the process of school selection (Ball & Vincent 1998; Bell, 2009; Cookson, 1994; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowie, 1995; Hall, 2009; Henig, 1994; Pullen, 2012; Reay & Ball, 1998; West & Varlaam, 1991). What David, et al. (1994), did conclude was that the gathering and use of information was important to the process of school selection and that mothers were most often responsible for the selection.

In a survey of decision-making theories over the past fifty years, Buckley and Schneider (2000) identified at least 16 different approaches. These approaches were comprised of 3 major categories, including normative models, behavioral decision models, and naturalistic models (Beach & Mitchell, 1998). Normative models were based on economic theories of utility and focused attention on how decisions are constructed, a rational choice approach. Behavioral decision models sought to apply psychological meaning to findings. Naturalistic decision theory comprised decision-making theories derived from observations (Buckley & Schneider, 2000).

In examining the literature about the school-selection processes, most studies centered on a normative approach. Some of these studies described parents as making choices based on

calculations of costs and benefits (Bosetti, 2004), while others focused decisions on the time parents spent in schools and the cost-benefit of staying with one school for all children within a family (Walker & Clark, 2010). Yet other studies examined choices in relation to socio-economic barriers and demographics of the population (Schultz, 2009). Bowe, Gewirtz and Ball (1994), aimed to give the chooser (parents) the ability to consider all possibilities like a painter chooses he paints and oils spread across a palette. Their work explored a theory of practice and the micro-economic factors involved in choice. Joshi (2014) presented a model that asked parents what they looked for in schools and what information they considered in making their choice; content versus process.

Bell (2009) proposed a model of school selection comprising a three-stage choice process: predisposition, search, and choice – and focused on parents developing choice sets depending on their socio-economic standing. Other studies, such as Galotti and Tinkelenberg (2007) and Bowe et al. (1994), focused on a model of decision-making using lists/reasons for selection as an outcome rather than a process. Studies using lists/reasons for choice did little to describe or understand how parents went about selecting schools for their children. These studies focused on why parents select schools rather than how they go about selecting them or the process of school selection, which is the more central question of this study.

This study used a normative model of decision-making. As mentioned earlier, a normative model is based on economic theories of utility or consumerism and focus attention on how decisions are constructed, a rational choice theory approach. The various constructs used as a framework for this study were derived from the Friedman and Hechter (1988) model of school selection, explored the process of school selection, the concept of who decides, the gathering and use of information, the negotiated actions involved and found those constructs

consistent with the broader literature on school selection (Ball & Vincent 1998; Bell, 2009; Cookson, 1994; Gewirtz et al. 1995; Hall; 2009; Henig, 1994; Pullen, 2012; Reay & Ball, 1998; West & Varlaam, 1991).

Since none of these studies included a means by which to understand the school selection process; a means by which to aggregate the various steps involved in school selection, the rational choice theory model was selected to form the framework for this study. The rational choice theory model developed by Friedman and Hechter (1988) and explained in Chapter 1 was the only theory that used an aggregation mechanism to explain the assemblage of the various constructs found in the mainstream of the literature. The aggregation mechanism includes a review of the various constructs used to explain how parents go about selecting schools. It is the theoretical underpinning and the framework of this study.

Precedent Literature

The precedent literature outlined in this chapter as part of the theoretical framework of this study formed the basic structure of this review (see Figure 1, p. 16) and includes: who decides; the gathering and use of information; negotiated actions of parental decision-making; and the aggregation mechanism of parental decision-making leading to the outcome of the process of school selection.

Parents as Decision-Makers – Who Decides

Many believe that, when considering school selection, mothers and fathers have an equal and responsible role in deciding which schools their children will attend. Research suggests that this assumption is incorrect (David et al., 1994).

The seminal work of David et al. (1994) examined the process of school selection and found that mothers were most responsible for selecting schools. Mothers handled the entire

educational process; helping with the children's preparation, assisting with all aspects of schoolwork, and rearing them. In 20 percent of the cases, both parents took responsibility for choosing their children's school. In 14% of the families, the children were the ones who chose.

These conclusions reflected the findings of other studies conducted in the United States and Europe, where mothers were also the primary individuals charged with the gathering of information and deciding where the children would attend school. Fathers confirmed the decisions, and children were sometimes included in the decisions (Reay, 1998). Reay and Ball (1998) also affirmed the perception that the selection process was a mother's work, mothers being responsible for the gathering of information and those most in charge. Ball and Vincent (1988) found that mothers had primary responsibilities for the children and are more influential in deciding which school they will attend. When both parents were involved in the decision, mothers played a constructive role and fathers, a confirming role (Reay, 1998; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001). David et al. (1994) asserted that the roles of fathers and mothers were different in that mothers played a closer role and fathers a more distant role. Brooks (2004) conducted research on the role of fathers and mothers and suggested that mothers were involved in these decisions, but fathers were also able and willing to play an important role.

Breaking down the familial context of parents, David et al. (1994) found that, in 75% of lone-mother households, the mothers were the lone deciders, and in 25% of lone-mother households, fathers were involved in the decision. In families where mothers and fathers were present, the mother was still the one responsible for school choice, with the father influencing the decision half the time. In 97% percent of all families, the child provided input about which school to attend, but the main responsibility belonged to the parents.

In working-class families, Reay and Ball (2009) found that, the children's wishes were a decisive factor in deciding which school to attend versus in middle-class families, who limited the input of children. As for who chooses, in working-class families, children were little adults, while in middle-class families, they were little innocents, unable to understand the complexity of the choice. A stark dichotomy existed between working-class and middle-class families (West & Varlaam, 1991). In working-class families, parents deferred the school selection to the children as educational experts. Parents in working-class families based this decision on the economic standing of the family and their lack of formal educational opportunities. Because of a lack of resources, parents restricted their choices to bounded systems of pre-selected schools and left to children the one or two choices that remained. In families selecting Kindergarten or elementary schools, the decision remained bounded and made by the mother.

In summary, mothers had the main responsibility of choosing schools for their children and to consider what their children desired. Mothers more often did the legwork to find the information necessary to decide, including what Ball and Vincent (1998) referred to as hearing about the school through the grapevine. Mothers of all social classes and family contexts were more involved in primary school selection than in secondary school selection. In working-class families, children decided more than in other family groups (David et al., 1994). This study examined the process used by Mexican American parents and obtained similar findings showing that mothers were the primary source of school selection, fathers were confirmers.

Gathering and Use of Information

Information gathering was cited as the most important construct in the literature of school selection (David et al., 1994; Gewirtz et al., 1995). It provided a base for parental decision-making and provided parents the necessary information with which to choose. The literature

also provided examples where socio-economics and culture affected how information was used. Information parents used to discern schools, came from what was called hot and cold knowledge. Hot knowledge was information coming from friends and family, and cold knowledge was information coming from official sources, such as the school. Grapevine information was synonymous with hot knowledge and pervasive in the research.

Hall (2009) examined the choice behaviors of parents who chose independent Christian schools (kindergarten) for their children. His findings were like those of other school choice studies pointing to information as being critical in decision-making (David et al., 1994; Bell, 2009; Pullen, 2012). He found that word-of-mouth information, known in the literature as hot knowledge or grapevine knowledge, was the most important source of information that parents used, as did Puccio (2000), who found that top sources of information used to make a school selection decision came from hot knowledge. This included information that came from talking with school administrators, talking with friends, open houses, children spending time in schools, and school publications. Louie and Holdaway (2009) reported that immigrants used little knowledge to make informed decisions. This happened because “they don’t speak English and they don’t know that much about schools” (p. 797).

Ball and Vincent (1998) reported on parental school selection and the use of grapevine or hot knowledge in the process of school selection. The various groups studied consisted of three groups: skilled/privileged, semi-skilled, and disconnected choosers. Skilled/privileged and disconnect choosers are differentiated strongly but not exclusively by social class, the second is a mixed group. “The skilled/privileged have high inclination to and capacity for choice; the semi-skilled have high inclination and low capacity for choice; and the disconnected have low inclination and low capacity” (p. 1). However, Ball and Gewirtz (1997) refuted Ball and

Vincent's (1998) conclusions based upon a perceived weakness of classification of groups.

Nonetheless, these three responses to grapevine knowledge were instructive.

The skilled/privileged professional middle-class took hot knowledge and replaced it with cold knowledge. The semi-skilled middle working class took hot knowledge and augmented that information with cold knowledge from schools and teachers. The disconnected made little use of grapevine knowledge since they were disconnected, new immigrants or lived in rural areas and disconnect from social groups.

It was the middle-class acceptors for whom grapevine knowledge was the most helpful. They were most able to "decode schools and ground their choice in the opinions of other parents like themselves on the possibility or promise of choosing a school which is socially embedded. This ensured that few parents, whatever their doubts or suspicions, could resist the pull or influence of grapevine knowledge" (Ball and Vincent 1998, p. 392).

In summary, research on information was replete in the literature and conclusive as the main driver of school selection. Grapevine knowledge was the most important type of information used in deciding which schools their children should attend. Grapevine information and hot knowledge were one in the same and originate with people. Information that was factual and came from official school sources was cold knowledge. This study found that Mexican American parents availed themselves of minimal information (hot and cold knowledge) before preselecting a school to consider. It was only after they had made the choice to visit a single school that they consulted the Internet, if any. Most of the information they gathered after making a choice of which school the children would attend came during their visit to the school.

Negotiated Actions of Parental Decision-Making

The negotiated actions of the rational choice model used in this study involve three basic processes: the hierarchy of preferences, opportunity costs, and institutional constraints.

Friedman and Hechter (1988) showed that actors or parents as decision makers had preferences, values, and utilities they brought to a decision-making process. Parents always had a notion of what their aim was. It was often through the negotiated actions that parents expanded, refined, restricted, and constricted their choices based on the elements of opportunity costs and institutional constraints. Opportunity costs involves the value placed on a rejected choice, the value given up to secure a higher value, leading to the aim under consideration (Buchanan, 1987). Institutional constraints were part of the rules of the game, constraints that structure decisions. These can be formal (rules, laws, and constitutions), informal (norms of behavior and codes of conduct), and rules that govern their enforcement (North, 1994). Without knowing what the aim or the perceived framework of the decision, the process of parental school selection would be more obscure. Therefore, this process of identifying constraints is so important in the process of school selection.

Within these negotiated actions, scarcity of resources was often the first mechanism examined when developing of a hierarchy of preferences. Possession of and access to resources would limit the ability to establish a full range of preferences. When dealing with scarcity of resources in a decision, opportunity costs also come into play, as parents would choose the next available choice versus the ideal they considered. They would choose a second or third choice, which lowers the cost benefit of the decision. Preference restructuring was based on a constraint upon the choice process. Institutional constraints also influence school selection. Social institutions and social norms are also part of institutional constraints in the process of school

selection. Schools themselves can provide constraints in that each has certain cultures that provide or restrict access.

Negotiated actions after parents have sorted through the information gathered led to an establishment of a new hierarchy of preferences. It was through this process that school options were expanded, refined and constricted. In summary, the byproduct of negotiations between opportunity costs and institutional constraints re-balanced the hierarchy of preferences leading toward a final presentation of the schools from which parents select.

In this study, there were little negotiations and Mexican American parents used the word ‘conversations’ rather than the word negotiations. The basic conversations involved in the school selection process were those of scarcity of resources when parents believed they may not be able to afford tuition. All parents in this study, who considered the construct of scarcity of resources ultimately decided to enroll their children in a Catholic school. The other focus of conversation was convincing fathers of the virtues of Catholic schools.

The Aggregation Mechanism of Parental Decision Making

The aggregation mechanism as used in Friedman and Hechter (1988) was defined as the separate action of individuals combined to produce a social outcome which in our study is the selection of Catholic schools by Mexican American families. The aggregation mechanism allowed for a better understanding and description of the process of school selection, including the gathering of information, the sorting and use of that information, and the negotiated actions involved in the consultations, compromises, and conflicts that lay at the center of the choice process. Most other studies about school selection failed to recognize a process of school selection or aggregation mechanism but rather established lists and reasons that explained why parents selected one school over another; content versus process. They failed to describe the

process of school selection (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Bast & Walberg, 2004; Bell, 2009; Bossetti, 2004; David et al., 1994; Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009; Hall, 2009; Hossler & Galahar, 1987; Puccio, 2000; Pullin, 2002; Reay & Ball, 1998; West, David, et al., 1994).

In summary, the aggregation mechanism in this study described the process of school selection. In this study, the aggregation mechanism chronicled: parents before being married, talking about the option of sending their children to a Catholic school, when the children became of school age; establishing aims; gathering and using minimal information before making a decision to visit only one Catholic school, versus two or three; receiving the major part of information about the school, from the school and school personnel; having conversations about the school based on scarcity of resources; convincing fathers of the virtues of Catholic schools; and visiting with the school principal. Instead of information being the critical aspect of the process, participants reported the visit with the school principal as being the most crucial part of the school selection process.

The Outcome of Parental Decision Making

When applied to parental school selection, the rational choice theory model described the choice of a school as a “social outcome” (Friedman & Hechter, 1998, p. 202). In the current study, the outcome of parental decision-making was already known, as the participants chosen for the study had already selected Catholic schools for their children. Further information about the participants in the study can be found in Chapter 3 under Participants. As an outcome of the study, the focus was on describing the aggregation mechanism used by parents who selected Catholic schools for their children.

The Context of Hispanics in the United States

This study's purpose was to examine the process Mexican American parents used to select the Catholic schools for their children. There are 55 million Hispanics in the United States today, of which 55% are Catholic. There are also 23 Hispanic subgroups, of which Mexican Americans constitute 65%. To understand such a diverse population is often difficult and their impact on the Catholic Church, schools and society even more difficult. Despite this difficulty, three exposés below examine (1) Hispanics in the Catholic Church, (2) a profile of the Hispanic population and (3) an academic profile of Hispanic children and the Catholic school.

A Profile of the Hispanic Population

For many in the United States, education and upper mobility is assumed. For Hispanic families, that reality is much more elusive. Many first-generation Hispanic families are poor, disadvantaged, and live with accumulated disadvantages that affect their educational and economic circumstances. Among many second and third-generation Hispanic families, their economic and educational circumstances improve. In developing a profile of Hispanics in the United States, the data are sometimes difficult to analyze and often point to semblances of Hispanic reality. Information can be broken down by generations, or can be delivered per the latest data available. The profile below is the closest approximation to the reality Hispanics live in the United States.

Cassinello (2005) shared that the reality of the Hispanic community in the United States is plural, complex, and asymmetrical. "The Hispanic population in the United States is not one homogeneous entity because there are many complexities that define the group, from first through third-generations to periods of migration and the twenty-one nationalities that comprise the group. This ever-changing reality making up the variable nature of Hispanics continues with

a pattern of migration that does not stop” (Cassinello, 2005). The last large migration period of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century had an end, but not the latest migration from Latin America, especially the migration from Mexico. To recount the statistics of second generation Hispanics born of the 1965 immigrants is very different to recounting the story of the second-generation Hispanics born of 2005 immigrants. Some suggest that the best way to understand the reality of the Hispanic population is to examine the generations cross-culturally with overlapping periods to understand its profile from generation to generation. What is known of Hispanics is that first-generation Hispanics are primarily Spanish-speaking and economically weak; the second is bilingual, with average incomes of \$30,000–50,000 per year; and the third generation is two-thirds English-speaking, with medium to high incomes (Cassinello, 2005; Suro, & Passel, 2003).

The Hispanic population is characterized by a strong sense of familism, which is defined as a strong commitment to family life and a subordination of individual interests. Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) describe this term as including three dimensions: a structural dimension, a behavioral dimension, and an attitudinal dimension. The structural dimension comprises family size, family structure, and fertility rates. The behavioral dimension comprises family role obligations. The attitudinal dimension comprises the values of family loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity. Hispanics also have higher fertility rates than non-Hispanics and are more likely to live in family households than non-Hispanic Whites. The family households of Hispanics are larger than their non-Hispanic White counterparts, have extended family members, and have children living in two-parent families.

As shown on Table 1 on page 32, the Hispanic population reached 52 million in 2010 with 31.7 million being of Mexican descent. Among the Hispanic population, population

growth from 2000 to 2010 was 43%, compared to White population growth of 9.7%. Growth among Mexican Americans accounted for 54% of the total Hispanic growth. The median age of Hispanics and Mexican Americans was much younger than the total population so more Hispanics and Mexican Americans are expected to be born than the general population. It is also important to note that 38.1% of all Hispanics and 37% of Mexican Americans were foreign born as opposed to 12% of the total population. This means that first generation families among Hispanics and Mexican Americans comprise over 37% of their total population (Garoogian, 2013).

Table 1
US Census Data 2010-Hispanic Population

Table 1

US Census Data 2010 – Hispanic Population

	US Population	Hispanic	Mexican American
Population	308,000,000	52,000,000	31,798,000
Population Growth	10%	43%	54%
Household Size	2.58	3.52	3.78
Median Age	37.2	27.3	25.5
High School Graduation	85%	62%	56%
College Graduation	28%	13%	9%
School-Aged Children	18%	22%	25%
Private School Enrollment	14%	7%	5%
Foreign Born	13%	38%	37%
US Born	87%	62%	63%
English Only	79%	24%	23%
Spanish Only	13%	76%	76%
Unemployment	8%	10%	10%
Home Ownership	66%	47%	50%
Median Home Value	\$188,400	\$185,900	\$155,200
Median Income	\$51,914	\$41,534	\$38,426
Per Capita Income	\$27,334	\$15,638	\$13,925
Households +100,000	21%	13%	11%
Household Food Stamps	9%	16%	15%
Poverty Rate	13%	22%	24%

Garoogian (2013) US Census Data for the Hispanic Population: Hispanic Databook (2012), PP7-9

Among Hispanic families, 85.1% live within a family household compared to 69.5% of non-Hispanic White family households. These family households decrease by generation: 88.6% for first-generation, 81.7% for second-generation and 80.9% for third-generation family households. The data clearly show that across generations, familism declines slightly. These statistics are consistent with the concept of high levels of familism among Hispanics. The concept of familism was often believed to be an impediment to advancement within a society. Recent literature, however, has regarded familism as a protective factor leading to family cohesion and social support, counteracting the consequences of poverty (Guendelman, 1995). The Pew Research Center defines first-generation Hispanics as those who were foreign-born or immigrants; second-generation Hispanics as children born of at least one foreign-born parent; and third-generation Hispanics as children born of US-born parents (Passell & Cohn, 2008).

In summary, the Hispanic population of the United States continues to evolve from an immigrant population to a native-born population. With an additional 11.3 million undocumented Hispanics living in the shadows (Krogstad, 2016b), the full potential of the Hispanic people cannot be fully measured. Because measurement from generation to generation is not always fully available, it is also difficult to develop a Hispanic profile that measures generational totals. However, the extrapolation of first, second, and third-generation Hispanic statistics within the total demography as collected in 2002 by the Pew Research Center, is astounding, with 63% of all Hispanics comprising of first-generation Hispanics, followed by 19% of second-generation Hispanics, and 17% of third-generation Hispanics (Pew, 2004).

Today, 37% of the Hispanic population is believed to be first-generation. If over one third of Hispanic families have parents who are foreign-born and second generation children

comprise another third, upward mobility for the Hispanic population is still, at least, two generations away. With the Hispanic population being younger than the non-Hispanic population, and the Hispanic birthrate surpassing the non-Hispanic birth rate by 56% in the last decade, the Hispanic population will continue to grow exponentially over time. Because 61.6% of Hispanic households contain married couples and 64.9% of Hispanic children live in two-parent families, the embodiment of family values will continue. Speaking English at home continues to be a problem and a key to educational success in the future. Home ownership continues to rise, but is below the non-Hispanic population. An examination of Table 1 also shows that being Hispanic and Mexican American still pose barriers to economic and educational progress in the future.

By all measures, a large part of the Hispanic and Mexican American population continues to lag behind their non-Hispanic counterparts economically. One hope for upward mobility is receiving an education that offers those structures compatible with success: discipline, academic focus and spirituality; found in the Catholic school. Exploring the process Mexican American parents use to select a Catholic school may provide a means by which Mexican American children can avail themselves of such schooling and therefore capture the linchpin leading to future upward mobility.

Hispanic Religiosity and the Catholic Church

To understand the essence of Hispanic religiosity of the many Hispanic subgroups in the United States, two words embody their journey; *acompañamiento* and *la lucha*. These two words depict a Hispanic people that are highly religious. This is best portrayed in the statistic that nine of ten Hispanics identify with a specific religion and that their religious experience is focused on ethnic-oriented worship. This portrayal is true for the newly immigrated, for those

who are native born and for English-speaking Hispanics. Hispanics are also spirit-filled which provides a better understanding of why many Hispanics leave the Catholic Church for Protestant congregations (De La Torre, 2009). For the Catholic Church and the Catholic school to be able to open their doors to more Hispanics, they must fully come to understand the concepts of *la lucha* and *acompañamiento*.

Acompañamiento depicts an act of being: being alongside someone's everyday joys and struggles, or befriending someone to affirm and value that individual's humanity and worth. *Acompañamiento* is the essence of friendship for Hispanics; this word translates to mean accompanying. For Hispanics, the act of *acompañamiento* helps them persevere in a society that seems to want to oppress or disappear the poor. Hispanics often identify with the prayer of the Stations of the Cross because it reaffirms their bond with Jesus, who suffers with them in their daily walk of life. The bonds they feel with God are a source of the hope experienced in their everyday struggles—struggles sometimes for survival. This is the way they navigate their journey. The best act of service for Hispanics and their children is to accompany them on their journey (Goizueta, 2009).

The other word often heard among Hispanics is *la lucha*, the struggle of their journey. This word has become “an intrinsic element of the way Hispanics, look at life, face life, and think about themselves... a fundamental concept that captures and synthesizes Hispanic insights, values, and ways of dealing with life” (Goizueta, 2009, p. 335). Many Hispanics find worth in *la lucha*: it gives meaning to life and explains why the elders of the community insist not on rejecting hardship, but rather embracing it. In theological terms, *la lucha* is accomplished by fulfilling the gospel message of loving one another and modeling the beatitudes, however difficult the struggle may be. To accompany Hispanics through their

struggle is the highest compliment one can provide (Isai-Diaz, 2009). Their culture brings with it a strong bond of family and community life, with an unwavering trust in God's providence. Despite the disadvantages and circumstances of immigration, poverty, and discrimination, the family provides Hispanics the impetus to persevere through *la lucha*. Many Hispanics also have an authentic Marian devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and a love for the Church. They see the Church as their home, "the place where they celebrate the Sacraments as they receive the saving grace of Christ, and experience the maternal love of Mary, the Mother of Christ, who is their Mother" (Aguilera-Titus & Deck, 2013, p. 4). What does this mean for the future of 55 million Hispanic Catholics in the United States and their encounters with the Catholic Church and Catholic schools?

Hispanics today, can transform the Catholic Church and Catholic schools. However, despite the presence and prominence of the Hispanic population, a problem is emerging; the Catholic Church in the United States is not fully tending to the needs of the Hispanic population. In 2010, 67% of Hispanics self-identified as Catholic. In four short years, 12% of those self-identified Catholics left the Catholic Church. That amounts to 6.6 million Hispanics who left the Church in just four years (Funk and Martinez, 2014). This is a dramatic drop. This simple statistic gives rise to many questions, including questions related to the future of Catholic schools, and the Catholic Church.

A study on "Hispanic Ministry in Catholic Parishes" conducted in 2014 by Boston University concluded that only 25% of all parishes in the United States served Hispanics. This was a rise of 10% from 1980 when only 15% of all parishes served Hispanics. There are 55 million Hispanics living in the United States with 30 million identifying themselves as Catholic. A 10% increase in parish outreach since from 1980 to 2014, to serve 30 million Hispanic

Catholics is a very, very small increase. This means that 75% of all parishes in the United States are not involved in Hispanic outreach, when it is in Catholic parishes that the newly immigrated seek familiar experiences previously known to them: church, sacraments, and family. These findings also show that most parishes supporting Hispanic ministry do so in isolation from the mainstream ministries of those parishes (Ospino, 2015). What does this portend for Catholic parishes and for Catholic schools in the United States?

In summary, *acompañamiento* and *la lucha* are at the essence of Hispanic religiosity, giving sustenance and purpose to the everyday journey of many Hispanics. For the Catholic Church and Catholic schools to understand their religiosity will require a transformation in the way they minister to Hispanics, in the way they walk alongside them, and in the way, they assist them through the struggle of everyday life. The Hispanic population needs the Catholic Church as the Catholic Church needs Hispanics. With only 25% of parishes in the United States ministering to Hispanics, rapid work is required if Hispanic losses are to be curbed. This problem is similar to when Catholic schools began to lose students after 1965, a decline which continues today; fifty years later. There are approximately 30 million Hispanics who self-identify as Catholic, providing a wonderful opportunity of growth for the Church and for Catholic schools.

An Academic Profile of Hispanic Children and Catholic Schools

When examining educational research related to Mexican American children, little is found since most educational data related to Mexican American children are often reported by agencies in the broader term representing all Hispanic subgroups.

The educational experience for Hispanics is one of accumulated disadvantages. The initial disadvantage is their parents' immigrant status, followed by their socio-economic status and then, their lack of knowledge about the US educational system. Most non-Hispanic parents and their children seek a college degree as an important part of their ability to transcend any disadvantages. Hispanics are also making strides toward attaining educational mobility. Of the 55 million Hispanics in the United States, 65% are US born (Stepler & Brown, 2016). Among children younger than 18, 94% were U.S. born (Patten, 2016). Additionally, 69% of Hispanic high school graduates in the class of 2012 enrolled in college that fall, two percentage points higher than the rate (67%) among their white counterparts (Fry & Taylor, 2013).

However, Hispanic students in many communities in the United States still attend schools lacking the economic and social resources with which to succeed school. Failing to develop close relationships with teachers has led to low rates of high-school and college admission. Schneider et al. (2006) claim that for Hispanics, family resources are critically important at the start of the schooling process.

Although Hispanics face accumulated disadvantages, there are signs of progress in preschool and Kindergarten attainment. Over a 15-year period, preschool advancement of Hispanic children has increased from 21% to 31% for 3-year-olds and from 50% to 59% for 4-year-olds. This is compared to the White percentiles from 44% to 44% for 3-year-olds and from 59% to 69% for 4-year-olds. However, the 5-year-old comparisons are astounding. Among 5-year-old children, 89% of Hispanic children attended Kindergarten in 2005 as compared to 93% of White children and 99% of Black children (Barnett & Yarosz, 2004).

Even though Hispanic children attend Kindergarten, they are still at risk of failing academically. Hispanic children are often confronted with accumulated disadvantages

including: mothers not completing high school; children living in low-income, one-parent families; and children having parents who speak a language other than English. For Hispanic children, 27% have no risk factors, 38% have one risk factor, and 33% have two or more factors as compared to risk factors for White children, which are 71%, 23%, and 3%, respectively. In Hispanic families, the increase or decrease of risk factors is predicated on speaking English at home. By the time these children reach the twelfth grade, their achievement gap is 18 points lower than their non-Hispanic counterpart. Over time, Hispanic students are making achievement gains but not enough to reach their White and Black counterparts, who also make similar gains (Schneider et al., 2006). The answer to this problem is to reduce the accumulated disadvantages and to place these children in schools known to provide schooling where the achievement gaps can be reduced even more. Teacher stereotyping and low expectations for Hispanic students, continues in elementary, middle school and high school, further undermining their academic achievement. In high school, Hispanic students receive limited guidance about college-oriented coursework, and are among the least likely either to take high-level mathematics and science courses, or to enroll in 4-year colleges.

Part of the solution can be the Catholic school. Immigrants and Catholic schools have long been linked since the mid-19th and early 20th centuries when Europeans arrived in the United States and found themselves ostracized because of their race, ethnicity, language, and religion. Immigrants kept close to the parishes that were established by ethnicity and language in response to Protestant and assimilationist tendencies of the public schools. These Catholic immigrants, throughout the 20th century and until the late 1960s, continued to use Catholic schools as a place to develop religious and ethnic identity, and academic and social mobility (Louie & Holdaway, 2009; Lazerson, 1977).

In 1964, there were 13,000 Catholic schools educating 5.2 million of the nation's children. In the same decade and beyond, Catholic schools faced many challenges. The departure of European immigrants to the suburbs where few schools were built, the departure of sisters from religious life, and a decline in enrollment provided a period of instability for Catholic schools which has lasted well into the beginning of the 21st century. Laity replaced religious as teachers, and schools never found the enrollment of the 1960s. The need to pay lay teachers just wages and losing students began a period of decline in Catholic schools: a period that Catholic schools have not recovered from in the 50 years hence (Louie and Holdaway, 2009). Today, there are 6,525 Catholic schools in the United States with an enrollment of 1.9 million children (McDonald and Schultz, 2016).

The new immigrants differ from those of the early 20th century. They come from Asia, the Caribbean, Mexico, and South America. They are diverse in terms of language, race, ethnicity, religion, and social class. Education in the lives of the children of these new immigrants plays a more significant role than it did in the early 20th century. The immigrants of today and their children require an education that culminates with a university degree. However, many of these immigrants face economic struggles, as do many Catholic schools across the US (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Do Catholic schools make a difference? Yes, they do! Gautier (2005) shared that non-Hispanic Whites, having attended Catholic schools, do not differ from their public-school counterparts regarding college graduation rates or having an income of more than \$75,000. For Hispanic Catholics, however, there is a stronger parallel between Catholic schooling and income. Hispanics who attended Catholic schools are twice as likely as their public-school counterparts to have a college degree and an income of \$75,000 or more. In terms of behavior and attitudes,

attending Catholic schools also make a difference: 75% of non-Hispanics who attended Catholic schools are registered in their parish as opposed to those that did not. Of Hispanics who attended Catholic schools, 70% are registered in parishes as opposed to 50% of those who did not attend. Of those who attended Catholic schools, 49% attend mass regularly as opposed to 38% of students who did not attend Catholic school. Catholic schools make a difference. Of non-Hispanic Catholics who went to Catholic elementary school and 70% who went to Catholic high school, 60% show that they would never leave the church, versus less than 50% who did not attend Catholic schools. Over 50% of those Hispanics who attended Catholic schools compared to 30% of Hispanics who did not attend Catholic schools say they would never leave the Church. Among millennial Hispanics, 86% show that being Catholic is important to them, as opposed to 68% of other millennials with 86% of Hispanic millennials also showing that church sacraments are essential to their relationship with God as opposed to 67% other millennials. Additionally, 83% of Hispanics show that it is important to them that younger generations of their family grow up Catholic, and that Catholicism contains a greater share of truths than other religions. Catholic schools do make a difference (Gautier, 2005).

However, how Hispanic children can enroll in Catholic schools remains unsolved. There are 307,654 Hispanic students enrolled in Catholic schools. As discussed earlier, encouraging Hispanic parents to enroll their children in Catholic schools is necessary if these Hispanic school-aged children are to close the achievement gap and propel themselves to college and gain generational upward mobility (McDonald and Schultz, 2016)

In 2012, the University of Notre Dame conducted a series of focus groups with Hispanics on Catholic schools. Seven cities were selected and the findings of the focus groups were very similar. Hispanics value Catholic education; their perception that Catholic schools are

unaffordable prevents them from enrolling in Catholic schools and even lessens the possibility they will seek information about Catholic schools. Conclusions of these focus groups included the belief by Hispanics that Catholic schools can provide benefits to the Church and to the community. Increasing enrollment in Catholic education can help to retain and nurture the assets that Hispanics bring to the Church, and help Hispanics integrate within the broader society. Although cost is a true reflection of the problem facing Hispanics, information, a sense of welcome, and someone speaking Spanish on behalf of the Church may provide a segue toward better integration (Notre Dame, 2012) and to family nurturing (Guzmán, et al., 2012).

In summary, Hispanics come to school with the accumulated disadvantages of their parents' immigrant status, socio-economic status, and not knowing much about the educational system in the United States. Speaking Spanish at home is also believed to be a key impediment to educational progress and attainment. Despite these disadvantages, preschool and Kindergarten attendance is on the rise and the dropout rate is in decline. High-school graduation and college attendance are also on the increase. These are positive trends when examining Hispanic educational progress. However, Hispanics must accomplish much work if their academic ambition is to reach the levels of their non-Hispanic counterparts. As far as Catholic school attendance, of the 17.9 million Hispanic children in the United States, only 1.7% attended Catholic schools. This low rate of enrollment, however, does not negate the progress made by those Hispanics attending Catholic schools. Catholic schools make a difference in terms of high-school graduation, college graduation, and fidelity to the Catholic Church. What is needed is to find a means by which Hispanic parents can enroll their children into Catholic schools. Hispanic parents' value Catholic education and see the good that the Catholic school can be for their children. However, their perception is that the Catholic school is expensive, and this

perception often causes them not to seek information (Guzmán, et al., 2012). Ways must be found to help Hispanic children become a part of the Catholic school, for their sake and for the sake of Catholic schools across the nation.

Summary

The review of the literature discussed the theoretical framework of the study, and the congruence of research gave prominence to the various constructs used in the theoretical framework used in the study. The framework included who decides and the gathering of information by parents. This was followed using that information as parents examined negotiated actions, leading to a final hierarchy of preferences used during the aggregation mechanism that describes the process of school selection and its outcome. The review of literature also gave context of Hispanics and Mexican Americans in the United States, Hispanics in the Catholic Church and to an academic profile of Hispanics in the United States.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study used a qualitative methodology with a multiple case study design to investigate the process used by Mexican American parents who selected Catholic schools for their children in what Reay and Ball (1998) referred to as “the consultations, compromises and conflicts that lie at the center of the choice process” (p. 431). This multiple case study included six cases. Semi-structured interview questions were used to allow the participants to respond in their own manner. Qualitative content analysis and a modified constant comparison method were used to analyze the data. This chapter includes the following: the context of the research agenda, research questions, research strategy, nomination and participant selection, sources of data, data analysis, trustworthiness, generalization, and transferability.

Context of Research Agenda

Being a researcher of Mexican American descent and having been involved in Catholic education for over thirty-five years, has provided a career with a two-fold focus: to assist Mexican American children the opportunity to acquire an academic and intellectual foundation with which to pursue higher education and to assist Mexican American students and their parent’s foundational opportunities in the areas of spiritual and religious formation.

A historical review of Catholic schools and of Mexican Americans in the United States over the last fifty years highlights an interesting juxtaposition phenomenon: the number of Catholic schools have decreased over this period while the number of Hispanic Catholics have increased (McDonald and Schultz, 2012; Patten, 2016). Half of all Catholic schools have closed since 1965 and 42% of all Catholics today identify themselves as Hispanic. The dilemma that

exists today is that there are few Hispanic children enrolled in Catholic schools. Additionally, Catholic schools today are struggling to find a mechanism by which to welcome Hispanics fully into their schools. Unless Catholic Church and school leaders, policymakers, and Mexican American parents navigate through this difficulty and provide a means by which Hispanic children can enroll in Catholic schools, those children as well as Catholic schools, will have missed an opportunity to reverse its decline.

What then, is the move forward? Catholic education has been a testament to the upward mobility and spiritual uplifting of Catholic children over the course of the last one hundred years. I have been witness to how a Catholic education can influence the lives of Mexican American children, whose families greatly sacrifice when enrolling their children into Catholic schools. Living in an area that is predominantly Mexican American, and serving in schools with over seventy percent Hispanic students, has provided the insight to conclude that Hispanic and Mexican American children flourish in a Catholic school environment.

Given that fact that there is little broad-based agreement on how to proceed, the fact that few Hispanic families are enrolled in Catholic schools, and an experience of working with many Mexican American families who sacrifice greatly to send their children to Catholic schools, this study of Mexican American parents and the process they use to select Catholic schools for their children may provide Catholic Church leaders, policymakers, and other Mexican American parents a better understanding of the process Mexican American parent use in selecting Catholic schools for their children.

Context of Catholic Schools in the Study

The study took place in a major metropolitan diocese in the Southern region of the United States. The diocese had more than a million inhabitants including a large Hispanic population. The diocese also included many families from Mexico, who were there on investor visas. Their children also attend Catholic schools.

In terms of language(s) spoken in the home, 97.2% of the population spoke English while 34.8% spoke English and Spanish. The median age was 34.1. In terms of the age stratification of the population, 73.7% of the population was over 18 years of age while 11.5% of the population was over 65 years of age. School-aged children were 24% (or 364,000) of the population, of which 3.5% (or 13,000) attended Catholic schools. The local household median income in 2014 was \$50,075 compared to the national median income of \$51,939. There were many colleges and universities in the proximate area with college tuition ranging from \$1,980 to \$39,000, per year. In terms of religion, 30.8% of the population was Catholic, 21.4% were Protestant, and 43.6% of the population identify themselves as having no religious affiliation (US Census, 2016).

As a means of providing some context about the Catholic schools that parents selected for their children, I offer a description of these schools. Within the diocese, there were forty-three Catholic schools serving 13, 000 students. Four Catholic schools were represented in this study: St. Henry's Catholic School, Holy Rosary Catholic School, St. Ambrose Catholic School and St. Mary's Catholic School. Three couples enrolled their children in Holy Rosary Catholic School and three couples enrolled their children at St. Mary's Catholic School. One of the couples that enrolled their children at St. Mary's, also enrolled their children in a Jewish day care, moved them to St. Mary's, then moved them to Holy Rosary and yet again to St. Ambrose.

St. Henry's Catholic School was a parochial school with 442 students from prekindergarten to the eighth grade. Its student body was 96% Catholic and 45% Hispanic. The tuition was under 6,000. The school offered a traditional Catholic school program. Religion classes and Mass attendance were required, as were in all Catholic schools within the diocese. It also offered athletics with football, basketball, baseball, volleyball, and cheerleading in its middle school. The school did not offer any bilingual nor special-needs programs. The school was in a middle-class neighborhood. St. Mary's Catholic school was a private school with 375 students in prekindergarten to the eighth grade. Its student body was 96% Catholic and 75% Hispanic. The school offered a traditional Catholic school program with a specialized educational approach from prekindergarten through the third grade. It also offered some opportunities for students without a mastery of the English language to enroll and receive English-language tutorials in and after school. Football, basketball, baseball, and volleyball were sports offered in its middle school. The school was in a middle-class neighborhood. The tuition was under \$6,000. Holy Rosary Catholic School was a school, formally operated by a religious order with fewer than 200 students from prekindergarten to eighth grade. Its student body consisted of 97% Catholic students, 70% of whom were Hispanic. Approximately 40% of the Hispanic population consisted of children of Mexican nationals; parents in the US on investor visas. The school offered a traditional Catholic school program with bilingual education and a band program, and it offered football, basketball baseball, volleyball, and cheerleading as part of their athletic program. The school was in a wealthier neighborhood of the city. The tuition was under \$8,000. St. Ambrose Catholic School was a private Catholic school. It served 422 students, 80% of whom were Catholic and 73% Hispanic. The school offered a small sports

program, band and did not offer bilingual education. The tuition was under \$8,000. The school was in an upscale neighborhood of the city.

I provided a basic description of the Catholic schools within the diocese and some data about the city where the study took place. To protect participant confidentiality, the information provided was not too descriptive.

On another note related to the context of this study, assimilation is often a key subject of conversation when speaking about Hispanics. When reviewing assimilation of Hispanics, the conversation is better explained within a specialized set of research. At the end of the Mexican-American War, Mexico ceded 55% of its land to the United States (Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming). The Rio Grande became the demarcation of where Mexico ended and the United States would begin. At that time, one percent of the Mexican population lived within this area. The treaty gave them all American citizenship. The area thus, remained culturally Mexican and religiously Catholic. The religious practices of this area, originated in the 1500s when the Spaniards conquered Mexico, remain today. The Mozarabic religious rite brought from Spain by the conquistadores still marks the religious and cultural fabric of the region. For example, the *lazo* and *arras* at weddings are meant to symbolize marital union and economic prudence. Presentation of female children to the church community and receiving its blessings is a rite of passage called a *quinceañera* celebration. It is partially a social and cultural construct as well as part of the Catholic Church's sacramental blessing. *Padrinos* are individuals who become godparents and take on an additional responsibility to care for their godchildren. Home altars are meant to symbolize the domestic church. Many of these practices continue to be a part of the lives of Hispanics today (De la Torre, 2009).

As a point of reference, the large presence of a Hispanic population in the United States is a phenomenon of the last fifty years. Since 1960, the Hispanic population has been on the increase. In 1965, the Hispanic population in the United States was 6 million, largely in California, New Mexico, and Texas. In 2000, the Hispanic population was 35.2 million and spread throughout California, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Georgia, and the Northeast, including Chicago, New York, and New Jersey (Garoogian, 2013). Today, the Hispanic population is 55 million and found in almost every metropolitan city of the United States (Patten, 2016).

Being Hispanic in this Southern region is often akin to being part of an ethnic majority where, in some cities, the Hispanic population is a majority and where historical, cultural and religious traditions form a strong fabric of multiculturalism versus other cities where the Hispanic population is still small and where many may still be asserting their economic and political rights.

Research Questions

Overarching Question 1 - What is the Process Mexican American Parents Use to Select Catholic Schools for Their Children?

The overarching question sought to understand the process used by Mexican American parents in selecting Catholic schools for their children. Parents have many choices when considering schools for their children. The question of why parents do not select Catholic schools has been answered in the existing literature and how parents go about selecting the Catholic schools is answered in Chapter 4. This study sought to understand the various steps involved and the consultations, compromises and debates parents enter in when selecting Catholic schools for their children.

Question 2 – Who Chooses: Who is Involved in the Process Mexican American Parents use in Selecting Catholic Schools?

The premise of this question sought to learn who in the family led the process of school selection and who was involved in the decision-making process. The literature established that the mother is often the individual that chooses with the father playing a confirming role. The role of grandparents or aunts and uncle sometimes also play a pivotal role in Hispanic families, especially if one or more contributes to the paying of tuition. Knowing who decides has bearing upon policy makers and practitioners in knowing to whom to focus recruiting efforts.

Question 3 – Use and Gathering of Information - What Sources and Types of Information do Mexican American Parents Gather and use in the Process of Selecting Catholic Schools?

This question sought to understand the gathering and use of information in the process of school selection. As part of the process of Catholic school selection, the first step parents often take is to look at the goals they have for their children and then to develop a listing of schools they may be interested in (Catholic, public, private). After having done so, they often gather information about the schools they are interested in. The information gathered can come from the school directly called cold knowledge such as statistics and achievement information. The other information gathered comes from family, friends and teachers called hot knowledge or grapevine knowledge. This information contains feelings about the school and how the school fits with parent desires for their children. Once parents gather this information, they make use of the information in different ways. Some parents only consider cold knowledge while others consider both. Working class families are more interested in hot knowledge over cold. The literature portrays this stage of information gathering as the most important stage in selecting a school.

Question 4 – Negotiated Actions - What are the Various Points of Negotiation Mexican American Parents Consider in Selecting Catholic Schools?

This question delved into the most significant stage of discerning which school parent's select. Once parents make an initial listing of the schools they will consider, they look at the gathered information and begin to negotiate the which schools they will consider. Various considerations are examined including future goals, whether they want single sex or coeducational schools, whether they want schools run by religious or run by laity or whether they want elite schools versus schools that consider admissions based on a diverse student body. Negotiated actions transition parents to a semi-permanent location in the school selection process. Negotiations also include the amount of tuition parents can pay and even if they can't afford tuition, whether they are willing to make the second choice that goes against the goals they have set for their children. Social grouping and constraints also factor in this step of negotiated actions.

Question 5 – The Aggregation Mechanism - What Aggregation Mechanism Constructs do Mexican American Parents use in Selecting Catholic Schools?

The aggregation mechanism is defined as those constructs involved in examining the school selection process from start to finish leading to a decision. In this study, participants examined their decision to enroll their children into a Catholic prekindergarten or kindergarten. This constructs included who chooses, the gathering and use of information, negotiated actions and the aggregation mechanism. The processes depended on more informal process and one that deviated from the Friedman and Hechter (1988) model of school selection, as the theoretical framework of the study.

Pilot Study

The methodology, along with the interview protocol used in this study, was pilot tested in the Spring of 2016. A pilot study was conducted to better understand the participant selection protocol to ensure that the purposeful selection criteria elicited the participants needed for the study and to test the interview protocol to ensure that the responses to the interview mirrored the data sought.

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants for the pilot study. Creswell (2003) identified that “purposefully selecting participants will best help the researcher understand the problem” (p. 185). Two Catholic elementary school principals with a high percentage of Mexican American were asked to nominate participants for the pilot study. The criteria used for selection included parents who were Catholic, of Mexican American descent, and who had a first born enrolled in prekindergarten or kindergarten of a Catholic school. Once the Principals nominated their participants, the researcher contacted one nominees who then agreed to meet with the researcher. After having learned about the study, the participant signed the consent forms required to participate in the study. The researcher then conducted two in-depth, tape recorded interviews with each two-parent couple. Following the two interviews, the recordings were fully transcribed and subjected to analysis through coding.

The pilot study provided an opportunity to examine the participant selection protocol to ensure that the purposeful selection criteria would elicit the participants needed for the study. Upon visiting with several elementary school principals, there were few students enrolled in kindergarten who were their parents’ firstborn. It was necessary to expand this criterion to include parents who had children enrolled in prekindergarten and kindergarten of a Catholic school.

The pilot study also provided an opportunity to preview the interview protocol to ensure that the responses to the interview questions provided the data sought. In this regard, the interviews were functional and took on a conversational tone. The interviews were effective in allowing the participants ample opportunity to expand upon the story of how they went about selecting a Catholic school for their children. However, making inferences about how Mexican Americans viewed Catholic schools, their value and their contributions to Hispanic families was not possible due to a lack of questions related to those topics. It was necessary to develop additional questions to ascertain a perception of Hispanic presence within Catholic schools and in the stories related to the participant's school selection journey.

Research Strategy

The purpose of this study was to understand the process used by Mexican American parents in the selection of Catholic schools for their children. This qualitative research approach sought a deeper understanding detailing how Mexican American parents made decisions about which schools their children would attend. It also provided policy makers and practitioners an understanding of the specific details of parental decision making with which to consider broader implications of Catholic school enrollment and Mexican American outreach.

To achieve a deep understanding of the process of Mexican American school selection, a multiple case study design was used and bounded by Catholic Mexican American parents who have children in Catholic schools. Case study accommodated a variety of perspectives – to test or build theory and offer a full description of the process of school selection as described by Baxter & Jack (2008). For this study, semi-structures interviews of six Mexican American Catholic couples were conducted and analyzed using content analysis where concept-driven and

data-driven coding allowed for an understanding of Mexican American Catholic school selection.

In Summary, Catholic couples with their first born enrolled in Catholic school prekindergarten or kindergartens were interviewed to obtain information about the process they used when deciding that their children would attend Catholic schools. The study's research design used a qualitative multiple case study research design with semi-structured interviews conducted with six couples that had children enrolled in Catholic school prekindergarten or kindergartens.

Nomination and Participant Selection

Catholic schools in the southern region of the United States, with a high percentage of Mexican American children served as the source for the study's participants. Mexican American parents who had their first-born children enrolled in prekindergarten and kindergartens of Catholic schools were purposively selected to participate. Parents of prekindergarten and kindergarten children were selected due to being points of entry into Catholic schools.

Purposive sampling was used for the study. Creswell (2003) identified that "purposefully selecting participants will best help the researcher understand the problem" (p. 185). The use of purposive sampling in this qualitative study lent itself to selecting participants who had children enrolled in a prekindergarten and kindergarten in a Catholic school.

Four Catholic elementary school principals with a high percentage of Mexican American students were asked to each nominate three Catholic couples of Mexican American descents who had their first-born children enrolled in either prekindergarten or kindergarten. Principals were given written criteria regarding whom to select. The criteria are as follows:

- The nominated parents must be of Mexican American descent,

- they must be Catholic,
- they must have a child enrolled in prekindergarten or kindergarten,
- the child must be the first born and,
- at least two of the three couples nominated must receiving financial help.

Once principals identified the various candidates, they nominated and submitted the names of the nominees to the researcher.

Once the nominations were made, prospective participants were contacted and asked whether they are willing to participate. From a sample size of 12, four couples who receive financial help and two who do not were selected. Once the selected participants provided their verbal consent to participate, a preliminary interview date was established. The interviews lasted approximately two hours. The interview involved meeting with each couple, getting written consent to participate, and gathering information about their background and their story and questions dealing with the process of school selection.

The interviews took place at a location close to the participant's schools. The researcher secured the interview data and any other written notes. When the interviews were conducted, both parents attended. The interviews were transcribed case by case. This resulted in over 250 pages of transcriptions to analyze. Each were then analyzed, using content analysis strategies for within-case analysis and a modified constant comparison method as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for cross-case analysis.

Each couple was given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. A consent form was supplied to each couple. It explained the study's purpose, indicating its confidentiality; that the interviews are being audio-recorded; and a notification that the participants could leave the study

at any time. These consent forms were fully reviewed and signed by each participant, at the time of the interview.

In summary, this multiple case study was conducted and bounded around the context of Mexican American parents' describing the process used to select Catholic schools. The study's primary focus was to describe the process used by Mexican American parents who had selected Catholic schools for their children.

IRB Approval

As part of the Catholic University of America's requirements, all proposed research studies undergo a process of approval for the protection of human subjects. The researcher sought permission to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. A Certificate of Completion is on file with the university from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research that certifies the researcher as having completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants" (08/24/2015; Certification Number: 16996273). Each participant provided a signature signifying consent and agreement to take part in the study. The Institutional Review Board issued a letter on January 21, 2016 certifying the study to be conducted was exempt under 45 CFR 46.101 (see Appendix E).

Sources of Data

There are many data collection designs that can yield rich data from a qualitative investigation perspective. The three most common means of collecting data in qualitative studies are interviews, focus groups, and observations. The purpose of an interview is to understand the experiences of others and to uncover the individual thoughts of those interviewed. Observations are intuitive processes that permit researchers to collect information by observing

actions and behaviors in natural surroundings. Focus groups use interviews with a small group of people (Creswell, 2009, 2007; McClure, 2002).

In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews as a means of data collection. Interviews were conducted to examine the views, experiences, beliefs, and/or motivations of the participants. The results of interviews provided a more detailed description of what was taking place within a study. The interviews also provided a deeper understanding of social phenomena under study.

In the first part of the interview, information about the couple and their parents was sought. Questions included: Tell me about yourself, your parents, where they were born, where you were born, how you met, about your children, your education, about your Catholic faith. Did either of you attend a Catholic school? Tell me why selecting a Catholic school for your children was important. Tell me how being Hispanic may have influenced your selection of a Catholic school for your children. Tell me about who in the family had the most impact in deciding which school your children would attend. Tell me about the hopes and aspirations you have for your son/daughter.

The second part of the interview was about the process parents used in selecting Catholic schools for their children. The various question asked of the participants involved the four major constructs of the study: who chose, the gathering and use of information; the various negotiated actions parents consider, and the examination of the aggregation mechanism (the various steps described to their individual process of school selection). Questions included: Tell me about the process you used to select a Catholic school for your children? Use and Gathering of Information: Tell me how you went about gathering information about the schools you were to consider for your children? Negotiated Actions: Tell me about the negotiations, conversations

or debates you had while deciding about which school your children would attend? Who Decides: Who made the final choice, that made the final decision? The Aggregation Mechanism: In describing the process of school selection from developing an initial list of schools, to the gathering and use of information and the negotiations, discussions, and debates about which school your children would attend, tell me how you put all of this together resulting in your individual school selection process (see Appendix A).

Dyer's (1995) interview guidance was used and incorporated into the interview protocol, which included: (a) stating the aim of the interview with the participant; (b) using semi-structured interview questions that were pre-planned; (c) having a beginning, middle, and an ending to the interview; and (d) ensuring that that they could end the interview at any time.

In terms of data collection, the semi-structured interview began with an overarching question, giving the participants an opportunity to share information about the general focus of the study. This was followed general demographic information and information of their background and parent's background. The interview then continued with questions about the various constructs found in the literature and in the theoretical framework of the study. Afterward each interview, the conversations were transcribed and used to inform the subsequent interviews, along with any field notes made from the interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis Protocol

In qualitative studies, data are analyzed using one of various qualitative data analysis methods. Qualitative data can be derived from descriptions of circumstances, people, and observed behaviors; from direct quotes taken from interviews; from texts of interview transcriptions; or from transcriptions from audio-recordings (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Multiple case studies are conducted when either similar results or contrasting results

may provide more compelling evidence (Yin, 2003). This study explored both similar and contrasting results. Per Yin (2003), there are three general analytic strategies for analyzing case study evidence: relying on theoretical propositions, thinking about rival explanations, and developing a case description. For this study, the analytic strategy relied upon the use of theoretical propositions as a framework from which to code the data consistent with the tenants of content analysis. The theoretical propositions included who chooses, the gathering and use of information, negotiated actions and the aggregation mechanism. A categorization matrix was used as the foundation from which the data were coded as per the guidelines established by content analysis.

Content analysis was used to analyze the data. It is a method that is both systematic and objective, as a means of describing phenomena (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) Content analysis involves the meanings, intentions, consequences, and context of qualitative studies (Downe-Wambolt, 1992). A modified constant comparison method was also used to analyze data between cases.

Using Creswell's (2003) processes for data analysis broadly, the data were (a) organized, (b) read thoroughly, and (c) coded. Qualitative software (NVivo) was used to manage the data. The responses from the semi-structured interview questions, once transcribed, were entered into NVivo and compared with the recordings to ensure that they were accurate. The data was then organized by the specific research questions, as the semi-structured interviews will have been conducted using the same structure.

In preparing the data, recordings of the interviews were transcribed. Those transcripts included all data. The transcripts were also member checked to assure that the participants said what they meant and meant what they said. The unit of analysis used was the entire document versus words, sentences or paragraphs. The data was then sorted in preparation for deductive

and inductive coding. The data was first categorized for deductive coding using the theoretical framework of the study (Friedman and Hechter, 1988) and developing a categorization matrix. The deductive portion of analysis required the development of a categorization matrix. The categorization matrix included elements of the theoretical framework and its subsections (see Appendix C). The adoption of a categorization matrix (coding scheme) developed from the theoretical framework, allowed for the accumulation and comparison across multiple cases (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009). The categorization matrix was first used on a sample of one case from which validity and consistency of the coding frame was verified. Further usage of the categorization matrix across cases allowed for the adding of categories and going back to verify the addition of new codes on earlier coded material. Only after all cases were coded deductively was full consistency met. The data were then coded inductively, with the use of an unconstrained categorization matrix. Inductive coding led to the development of themes across cases.

The data was also treated by dividing it into three phases: immersion, reduction, and interpretation as per Coffey & Atkinson (1996), Miles & Huberman, (1994) and Sandelowski, (1995). After each transcript was received, it was read thoroughly to become familiarized with its content. The transcript was first reviewed by comparing it with the audio recording. This concluded the immersion phase. The transcript was then placed into NVivo and nodes were developed to aggregate the data by theoretical framework constructs for each case. In doing so, the data was reduced to manageable amounts. After the reduction phase the data were then coded for within-case analysis followed by cross-case analysis and themes development using a modified constant comparison method.

In summary, it was first determined that the unit of analysis would be the entire interview and that the data would be categorized by research questions. Before that was done, the researcher immersed himself in the data to know what was going on in the data and obtain a sense of the whole; by reading the written transcripts several times. After making sense of the data, deductive and inductive analysis were conducted. The first step to deductive analysis was to develop a categorization matrix using the Friedman and Hechter (1988) theoretical framework of the study. The development of the categorization matrix involved a step by step process; first to examine the first case, then the second and third, until all cases were reviewed from which a full categorization matrix could be established. It was only after a complete categorization matrix was developed that the cases were analyzed and categorized by research questions and entered into Nvivo. This was then followed by an analysis of the data using an unconstrained matrix for data and categories not affiliated with the theoretical framework and entered into Nvivo. Once all the data had been entered into Nvivo, open coding was then used to further reduce the data and to develop subcategories from which to find meaning. Once deductive and inductive analysis were complete, data were coded using a modified constant comparison method to ascertain cross-case likenesses and differences.

Trustworthiness of Results

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985,) trustworthiness in qualitative research is to assure that the findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. A common feature in qualitative content analysis studies is that trustworthiness is best achieved by reporting the process of qualitative analysis as accurately as possible (Elo, et al., 2014, p. 2).

When using qualitative content analysis, the aim is to build a model that describes the phenomenon in a conceptual form. Deductive and inductive analyses are used to code the data. Deductive analysis is used when there are theoretical constructs supporting the research and inductive analysis is used when participants focus on issues not affiliated with the theory-based categorization matrix associated with deductive analysis. Questions of trustworthiness related to qualitative content analysis can also be described by words coined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) such as: (a) credibility, (b) dependability, and (c) confirmability. These terms will be described below. There is debate about whether quantitative terms like rigor, validity or reliability should be used when describing trustworthiness of qualitative content analysis.

From the perspective of credibility, researchers ensure that research participants are identified and described accurately. Dependability means that the data, overtime, from its gathering using interviews, to the analysis using a categorization matrix, to the findings and conclusions are described [accurately]. Conformability refers to the objectivity of data that should remain congruent between participants (Elo, et al., 2014, p. 2-3).

Credibility represents the truth value of the conclusions posed at the end of the study, comparable to internal validity in quantitative research. Miles and Huberman (1994) posit three questions to be used to ensure credibility of the conclusions: (a) Do the conclusions make sense, (b) Do the conclusions adequately describe the participants' perspectives, and (c) Do the conclusions authentically represent the phenomena under study? In terms of credibility, member checking is also considered "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). It involves returning data to the participants for their review to ensure accuracy. For this study, member checking was used after the interviews had been transcribed.

In five of six cases, the participants read their transcribed interviews and verified their answers to the questions posed during their specific interviews. Verifying through member checking helped increase the credibility and validity of the information gathered and minimized any researcher distortions. Credibility of research findings were also enhanced because of how well the findings of individual cases matched up with the other cases. According to Tobin and Begley (2004), “Credibility (comparable with internal validity) addresses the issue of ‘fit’ between respondents’ views and the researcher’s representation of them. It poses questions of whether the explanation fits the description (Janesick, 2000), and whether the description is credible” (p. 391–392). One of the ways to show credibility is through the technique of member checks and triangulation of multiple case similarities (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The use of multiple cases ensures validity based on their findings according to Yin (1984). When multiple cases are studied, reliability is also enhanced in that they contain similar categories and results, as part of the study. However, equally important is that the process of analysis and the results have sufficient details that describe how the analysis was carried out and how the results were linked to interview data. In the presentation of the study’s findings, all assertions, categories and themes are linked to interview data. Authentic citations were used to increase trustworthiness and to point out to readers the place where the original data categories were formulated as suggested by Patton (1990) and Sandelowski (1992).

Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, and Guyatt (2005) established a method to ensure that qualitative studies meet the standards of validity and trustworthiness. This method included five propositions. The first proposition called for the case study research questions to be clearly written and substantiated. They were. The second called for the design of a case study to be appropriate for the research question. It was. The third called for purposeful sampling

strategies appropriate for a case study. The participants were purposively selected. The fourth called for data to be collected and managed systematically. It was. The fifth called for the data to be analyzed correctly. The data was analyzed using the qualitative content analysis steps as outlined by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009). This study met these standards of validity and trustworthiness.

Important to this study was the theoretical framework that contained constructs found in the literature and those outlined in the rational choice model of Friedman and Hechter (1988). Validity was enhanced by the framing of the study's analysis using these same theoretical constructs. Findings of the study were clearly linked to these constructs and to the data derived from the participant interviews, across all six cases.

Generalization and Transferability

There is no expectation that the findings and conclusions of this study can be transferred to other instances or studies.

Summary

This study used a multiple case research design to investigate the process used by Mexican American parents who had selected Catholic schools for their children through what Reay and Ball (1998) called "the consultations, compromises and conflicts that lie at the center of the choice process" (p. 431).

Six sets of Catholic parents who had their first-born children in prekindergarten or kindergarten were purposively selected to engage in interviews concerning the process used to select Catholic schools for their children. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews and content analysis and constant comparison was used as the means of data analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Overview

This study analyzed the process Mexican American Catholic parents used to select Catholic schools for their children including who in the family chooses, the gathering and use of information, negotiations that take place and the constructs used in the aggregation mechanism leading to a Catholic school outcome. The study is grounded using an adaptation of the Friedman and Hechter (1988) rational choice model of school selection. The research findings chapter explored the decision-making process used by Mexican American Catholic parents in selecting Catholic schools for their children and presents vignettes of each exemplar share the story of their journey.

According to Friedman and Hechter (1988), the protocol outlining the school selection decision-making process consisted of various constructs: who chooses; information; negotiated actions; and the aggregation mechanism. These constructs, as written, expected parents to establish an initial list of schools about which they would seek information, then restrict or expand the list based on the information received, proceed to visiting the selected schools, speak with family and friends, and once again seek further information from the schools. Once having visited the schools and spoken to friends and family, parents would enter into a period of negotiations where they would consider the various elements of the schools and the costs involved in attending these schools, including tuition, transportation, and distance. They would then consider the process they undertook and develop their final school selection. The process was formal and linear, thus, a rational process of school selection. In talking with the participants of this study, the process they described included many constructs of the Friedman

and Hechter (1988) model, but the particular dimensions within these constructs were different and the process used was more informal.

Research Questions

This study focused on various research questions.

The overarching and other questions of the study were:

Overarching 1 – What is the process Mexican American parents using to select Catholic schools for their children?

Question 2 – Who chooses: Who is involved in the process Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools?

Question 3 – Gathering and use of information - What sources and types of information do Mexican American parents gather and use in the process of selecting Catholic schools?

Question 4 – Negotiated actions - What are the various points of negotiation Mexican American parents consider in selecting Catholic Schools?

Question 5 – The aggregation mechanism – What aggregation mechanism constructs do Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools?

In the study, I also sought to answer the following four sub-questions: Who are the various individuals involved in the process of deciding which school their children will attend, and who ultimately chooses? What sources and types of information do parents gather and use in the process of deciding which schools their children will attend? What are the various points of negotiation that parents consider in the process of deciding which school their children will attend? What are the various factors involved in the aggregation mechanism that defines the parents' process of deciding which school their children will attend?

Study Participants

The study's participants consisted of couples who were Catholic, of Mexican American descent and who had their first-born enrolled in a Catholic school prekindergarten or kindergarten classroom. These couples were purposively selected. Four Catholic school principals were asked to nominate Catholic parents of Mexican American descent who had their first-born children enrolled in prekindergarten or kindergarten. At least three of the families were receiving financial assistance. Once the principals nominated parents, all prospective participants were contacted and asked if they were willing to participate. Some participants expressed a willingness to participate but lacked time to meet and be interviewed. Two expressed an inability to meet together and wanted to meet independently without their respective spouses. These five couples were excluded. Seven couples were selected and one was identified as an alternate. In the process of gathering the data, one of the selected couples did not complete the interview.

The six Mexican American married couples consisted of three earning below \$100,000 and three earning above \$100,000. One couple had no college degrees, another had bachelor's degrees, and the rest had bachelors and master's degrees. Most of the couples were second-and third-generation Americans. Four of the six couples struggled to pay for Catholic school tuition. Table 2 depicts the demographic information of the study's participants.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Name	School	Income	Degrees	Occupation	Gen.	Cost
Palacios	Holy Rosary	\$175,000	N/N	Management	4th/4th	OK
Mendoza	St. Mary's	\$ 70,000	B/M	Engineering	3rd/2nd	S
Gomez	St. Mary's	\$250,000	M/B	Finance	3rd/3rd	OK
Gonzalez	St. Mary's	\$ 80,000	M/B	Social Work	3rd/4th	S
Rangel	Holy Rosary	\$ 90,000	B/B	Sales	2nd/3rd	S
Esparza	Holy Rosary	\$100,000	M/M	Health Care	3rd/3rd	S

Note. Mex-Am = Mexican American, M = married, M/M = master's/master's, M/B = couple's top degree earned being master's/bachelor's, N/N = no degree, S = struggle with tuition, OK = do not struggle with tuition.

Vignette One: Mr. and Mrs. Palacios**Background**

As Mr. and Mrs. Palacios walked into the conference room where we were to talk about the process used to select Holy Rosary as the Catholic school for their two sons; they were talking to each other in full voice, excited to see each other after a day at work and fully engaged in each other. Their stride, their body language, and their engagement with each other were like that of teenagers, oblivious to their surrounding as if they were the only two in the room. Holy Rosary was a school formally operated by a religious order. Their charisma, still present, provided for a more orthodox and traditional schooling than more of its counterparts on the diocese. The school population was mostly Hispanic; and had a large percentage of Mexican

National children enrolled. The school offered a bilingual program, band and arts program and an athletic program. The school was also affiliated with a local high school within the diocese.

As we proceeded with the interview, Mr. and Mrs. Palacios began to share about their family and their home, and the fact that even before they were married Mrs. Palacios had always wanted their future children to attend Catholic schools. “Our children attending a Catholic school had always been a desire of mine. Even before we were married, I shared with [Mr. Palacios] that I wanted our future children to attend a Catholic school.” When they began looking for a school for their son John, it became clear that they wanted a school that was structured and disciplined; they found that in a Catholic school.

A glimpse into their home provides a window into their thinking as parents who had spent some time thinking about and contemplating their roles as parents and how they wanted to raise their children. From our conversation, I learned that their home routine was structured, their home orderly and their parenting style very disciplined. Their son John was in prekindergarten. He was the child we mostly spoke about. However, they also had another son in PK2 and a daughter they had adopted soon after she had lost her parents in an automobile accident. She was enrolled in a public high school.

As I continued listening to a description of their family’s interaction and their afternoon routine, I could see John and his brother arriving from school, brought home by either mom or dad or his grandparent, who happened to live next door. They later shared that her parents had purchased their home, next door to them.

When asked how his day went, John would either give a thumb’s down or a thumb’s up. Thumbs up meant that he received a green sticker representing that all went well or a yellow sticker that signaled there were problems at school. The yellow sticker seemed to always come

from Spanish class. As John continued to share, he seemed to know whether he would be allowed to play outside that day or whether he would be restricted due to the yellow sticker. His routine would be to get out of his school clothes and into something more relaxing, get a snack, and begin his homework. He often wanted his mom or his dad to help, and even somedays he asked for his grandfather to stay and help with the homework. John was a unique 4-year-old boy. He was very verbal, more mature for his age and inquisitive. Structure and routine was something Mr. and Mrs. Palacios expected of all the children. At dinnertime, John always wanted to lead the prayer. With an accent his parents identified as a Boston accent, due to a slight speech impediment he had, John would slowly speak the words as part of saying grace. Dinnertime was a time to share the different happenings of the day. After dinner, it would be time for a bath, some play with dad, and then to sleep. Their going-to-bed routine was also structured. By 7:30 in the evening, the boys never wanted to go to bed, but mother insisted, and dad most often gave them a few minutes more, after the few minutes he had already given them. Sometimes he would say, "No, it's time for bed," and other times, it seemed okay to keep them up. As mother, would glance over to see them, they knew it would be time for bed. The going-to-bed-routine was jumping into bed as dad read them a story. The boys shared a room. Most nights, before dad was done with the story, the boys were fast asleep. Now there was time to debrief and spend time with their daughter.

Further conversation provided me a sense they had high expectations for all their children and that they treated their daughter with the same high expectations they did their sons. They shared that on Friday evenings; it was chore night at the Palacios household and described the routine. John could be seen running around the house. Focusing more clearly, he went from room to room gathering the dirty clothes. His job was to take the dirty clothes from

everyone's hampers to the laundry room, where mom would wash the laundry. They described the routine as comical at times, when this three-and-a-half-foot-tall boy would fall all over himself as he tried to finish as quickly as possible. If he completed his chores, he would have an opportunity to watch a favorite movie. The younger son was tasked with helping his mother put the clothes into the washer. Looking for movement in their daughter's room, there was often none. Her chore was to tidy up her room and arrange it as spotless, and then bring the bed sheets to the laundry room. This seemed to be a harder task and one not done as freely as the younger boys. They could hear her yell down to dad that she did not want to do it, and her dad following quickly with "if your brothers can do it, so can you." Structure and discipline was certainly the way these children would be raised and something the parents looked for in their children's school.

Mr. and Mrs. Palacios were married in 2010, when she was 33 years old and he was 26 years old. Today, they are 38 and 31. Their daughter is sixteen; John is four and a half, and their youngest turned three. Life before the kids was very different. Both were dedicated to their work, and they described their hours as outlandish hours, often working 18 hours a day. She was a manager of a large, nationally known department store and he was an up-and-coming employee at the same store. They had a family income of \$175,000.

Envisioning the department store where they worked before they were married, I saw a very dedicated manager, having little time for personal endeavors and always a company individual. He fancied her much more than she ever noticed him. One day he came up to her and asked "will you go out on a date with me?" She responded, "I can't, you're an employee." Not knowing whether it was a brushoff, he went away as she continued with her managerial tasks. Two weeks later he requested a transfer to another store. A few months later, he was

named manager of another store and she was asked to help him open the store. As she walked into the store, soon after he was appointed manager, he caught her eye again and he then proceeded to ask, in the middle of the showroom, “Hey, will you go out on a date with me now?” There did not seem to be any way to get out of the request. She said she would, but told him, “If my friends or parents don’t like you, it’s over.” A year later, they were married; not in a Catholic Church, as she had wanted, but in a hall. She had been married in a Catholic Church before and since she did not seek an annulment, was restricted to do so again. The second wedding was even better; small, but the people who were supposed to be there, were there. Joy abounded!

A year later, their son was born and she would leave the department store and begin to focus on life as a mother. After that transition, Mr. and Mrs. Palacios would often discuss finances, how they would raise their children, and whether they would be able to purchase a larger home. With her not working, money was tight and buying a larger home while her parents helped them pay the bills, was not a viable option. Soon after their son was born, they received a phone call informing them that their best friends had been killed in an auto accident. Distressed but knowing that they had to step in, they approached their friends’ family to ask if they could adopt their best friends’ daughter. They did so. Bringing the daughter to live with them, providing her with a home and family, they worried about her integration into the family and into a new school. They asked their newly adopted daughter whether she would want to remain in the same school or move to a school closer to where they lived. She opted to remain where she was. After all, the teachers and counselors knew her well and they believed that it would be in her best interest to remain. Mr. and Mrs. Palacios embraced their newly adopted daughter without reservation and they demonstrated great sensitivity to what would be in her best interest, even though they may have preferred to enroll her in a Catholic school.

Heritage

Mr. and Mrs. Palacios were born of Mexican American parents and are both fourth-generation Americans. A glimpse into the Palacios' family home seemed to parallel her own. Structure and discipline prevailed. Her father had been a career military officer and her mother a housewife and later a clerk in a local hospital. Affinity to family was a theme that carried throughout her life with her parents. In fact, both her mother and father, as youngsters, made sacrifices to ensure their siblings would be able to attend college. Education was very important to them. Her father, when thinking about attending college himself, enlisted in the military and was instrumental in paying for all his siblings to attend college. Her mother equally did the same. She dropped out of school and started to work for her siblings to be able to attend college. Family was the most important value her parents espoused. She learned about hard work and determination from her father and the importance of education from her mother. Mrs. Palacios was one semester away from earning a bachelor's degree. Her parents were churchgoers and her grandparents played an important role in her religious upbringing. Although the thought of being of Mexican American was not strongly referred to while growing up.

A glimpse into Mr. Palacios' family's home also seemed to parallel his own. His father was known to be the disciplinarian of the family. Structure and discipline was what Mr. Palacios learned from his parents. His father was a truck driver who worked very long hours and did so to provide what his family needed. They did not go without. His mother was a licensed vocational nurse. His parents divorced when Mr. Palacios was in high school. Following the divorce, he then went to live with his mother. Although he shared that he had learned the importance of education from his father, Mr. Palacios was just getting around to

enrolling. From his mother, he learned courage. Being of Mexican background was also not commonly referred to as he grew up.

The Journey to Choose a Catholic School

Thinking back to when Mr. and Mrs. Palacios began to consider Catholic schools for their children, Mrs. Palacios remembered having a conversation even before they were married about how she wanted their children to attend Catholic schools: “I wanted them to go to a Catholic school because my dad went to a Catholic school and he has an amazing work ethic, and I always looked up to him because of that.” Mr. Palacios recalled that he was noncommittal: “I was open to the idea but not swayed one way or another.” Both, Mr. and Mrs. Palacios attended public schools.

Still, their lack of initial agreement did not curtail her desire to select a Catholic school for their children once the children were of school age. Her desire would be pivotal in the decision of selecting a Catholic school for their children. When John became school-aged, they initially considered two public schools, a Catholic school, and the daycare their sons were currently attending. As the Friedman and Hechter (1988) model outlined, the Palacios preselected a list of schools they would consider. They quickly discounted the public schools, and since the daycare their children attended would not offer kindergarten in the future, the only choice left was the Catholic school. The Catholic school near their home fit the logistics of their commutes to work, but Dad would have to be convinced.

Mrs. Palacios and her dad would often drive out of their neighborhood together. One day, he first noticed the Catholic school about two miles from their respective homes. As they passed by this school for the first time, her father said, “You see that school? It’s a Catholic school.” She didn’t respond since her son was only two years old, at the time. She did, however,

store the morsel in the back of her mind. When Mr. and Mrs. Palacios began to think about which kindergarten their son would be attending, she remembered that small school, close to her home that her father had pointed out. It seemed perfect, close to their home, and on the way to and from work.

During that same period, as Mr. Palacios picked their son up from the daycare he was attending; he noticed that different teachers would bring John to the car and help him into it. Opening the car door was not at all unusual; however, what became unusual, over a period of the month, was that three different teachers brought John to the car. When talking to John about his teachers, he admitted that his previous teachers had left and new ones appeared. Mr. Palacios was becoming dissatisfied with the daycare. Then one another day, when it was Mrs. Palacios turn to pick her son up from daycare, she got out of the car to ask the director how they were doing with kindergarten enrollment. The director told her that she did not think the enrollment would be enough to house kindergarten the following year and that it would be discontinued. This was the time Mr. and Mrs. Palacios had begun to understand that they may need to select another school for John.

Without remembering the comment his wife had made years before, before they were married, Mr. Palacios had begun to think about two public schools that were close to their home. After all, since John was going into prekindergarten, their decision to move would not have to be immediate since they had one more year in which John and his brother could remain. However, as they thought about it, they were convinced that moving them then, would be the best decision. At the same time, Mrs. Palacios remembered the school her father had pointed out some years before. She wondered about that specific Catholic school while her husband focused attention on the public schools. Knowing that she would have to convince her husband of the virtues of

Catholic schools, she first proceeded to find out about the public schools. She spoke to a cousin about the schools and met a friend who taught at one of the schools. They both spoke to her about high student–teacher ratios. Her teacher friend said, “When I have a class and the classroom is [full of kids] and a kid is not struggling, I can’t give that student as much encouragement as I would like to because I worry about these three that are struggling.” Mrs. Palacios could put aside that piece of information, shared it with her husband and proceeded to tell him she was going to remove the public schools from her list. He was okay with her decision. She then proceeded to provide some information about Catholic schools:

It was like when the kids were in bed every night, it would be like, “What are we going to do? We’ve got to talk about John’s school.” We’d continuously go over the pros and cons, and the conversations flew.... I think like after probably about a week and a half, it went from going back and forth about the Catholic school. Okay, so this, you know, “If we take him to (the Catholic school), you know, it feeds into their high school so he has the ability to go there all the way up until high school” ... The structure’s there, the religion’s there.

Mrs. Palacios continued lobbying for the Catholic school, Mr. Palacios began to yield. He shared the final crux of his thinking:

Listening to what she had to say and (seeing) the things that she put in front of me about Catholic schools, and private Catholic schools in general, what they could offer over public schools—that kind of persuaded me to be open to look at the [Catholic school] we chose.

Soon after they decided they would consider Holy Rosary, the Catholic school proximate to their home, Mrs. Palacios consulted the Internet, primarily to find out about the school

program and the tuition. To give Mr. Palacios an opportunity to make an independent decision regarding Holy Rosary, Mrs. Palacios asked him to visit the school and get an impression of the program, the children there, and a feel for the school. He proceeded to visit the school and brought along his son.

Holy Rosary is a diocesan school with 197 students from PK-2 to eighth grade. Its student body consists of 97% Catholic students, 70% of whom are Hispanic. Approximately 40% of the Hispanic population consisted of children of Mexican nationals, citizens of Mexico. The school offers a traditional Catholic school program with bilingual education and band classes that are required for all middle school students. The school also offers an athletic program with football, basketball, baseball, volleyball, and cheerleading at the middle school and an intermural program for elementary.

During Mr. Palacio's visit to the school, he drove onto the campus to find limited parking—some twenty-five spaces caused most parents to park on the street that divided the campus; the elementary school was on one side of the street and the middle school on the other side. The administration offices were in the middle school building that had recently undergone a remodel for further enrollment.

As he came into the administrative offices, Mr. Palacios was greeted by an administrative assistant who had been with the school since its founding. She imbued the charism of the school, orthodoxy, conservatism, and holiness. Mr. Palacios was then introduced to the vice principal; happy and cheerful, she believed in the school and spoke of her own children's happiness at the school. This gave Mr. Palacios the sense that this Catholic school could be a place where his son would be happy. They quickly shared some tears as the vice principal shared some personal stories about her own children at the school. Theirs was an immediate

emotional connection. He then turned to look at his son, who was already playing with another little boy right outside the office. As they toured the school, they saw older buildings, actual trailers, and a playground that was not as state-of-the-art as the one they were used to at the daycare. The lack of a state-of-the-art playground seemed to be a concern since their son, John, had asthma. At the daycare, the playground had misting devices that allowed John to be outside without affecting his breathing. This would be something he would later discuss with his wife. The children looked happy and engaged, and the teachers seemed genuinely empathetic with the children.

When introduced to the principal, Mr. Palacios quickly knew that they would enroll his son at Holy Rosary. The principal shared that they were investing in families and that the investment needed to be reciprocal. Also, that it was his privilege to have John attend the school. Mr. Palacios learned much about the school and enjoyed the visit, liked that his son was very happy during the tour, and felt in sync with the principal that the school and parents needed to come together to support one another. He left Holy Rosary knowing that the school would be a good match. He would later insist that his wife visit the school.

After he returned from the school visit, he was ecstatic about what he had found and became convinced that the school would be the correct fit. He told Mrs. Palacios everything he felt about the school and everything that he saw “good” in the school. He could not see any negatives. Mr. Palacios further told his wife that she needed to visit the school; he would not consider enrolling their children without her visiting the school. Mrs. Palacios visited the school, and she too was convinced that this was the school for their son.

I think what got me is what the principal asked. He asked me, “How would you describe your parenting?” I said, “[My husband] and I are rewards and consequences. You do

‘good’, the rewards are out there, you know, within reason. You do ‘bad’, there are consequences. You cannot go through life without knowing that.” Then he asked, “Do you know why I do an interview?” I said, “No. I wouldn’t, you know, with everything else going through my mind, I would just assume to meet and greet the parents?” He’s like, “No, I do it because I tell parents that ‘If you’re going to invest this in your kids and we’re going to do it here at school, you need to understand that I need you to invest at home. You’re responsible for delivering the same message and being involved in your kid’s life. I cannot have kids come here where their parents are not involved because it’s not going to work. It’s a relationship. That’s when I knew because that’s what I wanted. I wanted someone committed to my son and his growth with, you know, our religion and the academics. I knew that we would be doing the same thing at home.

Mrs. Palacios knew, before they married, that she wanted her children to attend a Catholic school, although Mrs. Palacios did not have any leaning toward this. When it came to selecting a school, they discounted two public schools rather quickly due to a perceived notion of a poor student-to-teacher ratio that her friend, a public-school teacher, had shared with her. Additionally, the fact that the daycare did not have a kindergarten option left the door open to sending their son to the Catholic school closest to their home (two to three miles away). The decision came down to the logistics of their work commutes, the school being close to their home, and the meeting with the school’s administrators. They gathered minimal information before deciding to conduct a tour of the Catholic school. Any negotiations that may have taken place were considered conversations as Mrs. Palacios continued to provide Mrs. Palacios pros and cons about Catholic schools, which ultimately persuaded him, along with his visit to the school, that Holy Rosary would be the perfect choice for their son(s).

In summary, it was Mrs. Palacios who directed every step of the decision-making process. Even before they were married, she knew the children would attend a Catholic school. Although her husband was non-committal then, when their son came of school age, she slowly convinced him that a Catholic school would be a better choice than a public school; Catholic schools were more advanced in their academics and faith for their children was important. Beside information obtained from the Internet, related to school programs and tuition at Holy Rosary, they sought minimal information about Holy Rosary or from any other Catholic schools. Her father had mentioned Holy Rosary several years before and she admired him and credited the person he had become to the Catholic school. This weighed heavily in her encouragement that her husband too, considers the Catholic school as a best choice for their children. Additionally, when finding out about the public schools under consideration, she seized on the information received from a teacher and discounted both without visiting the school or seeking clarification about the information received. The only substantial information they received was provided by the vice principal and principal during their visits to the school. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Palacios ever accepted the term negotiations in any of our discussion. They called any give and take, conversations. By definition, they were negotiating but using the term 'conversations' seemed less antagonistic. Staying up late at night provided Mrs. Palacios the opportunity to speak with her husband and bring him ever closer to understanding the value of Catholic schools and how their children would benefit. He agreed and soon after visited the school. He left the school convinced that his children would enroll. She later visited the school and confirmed the decision.

Portrait 2: Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza

Background

It was a mild late afternoon when I first met Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza waiting outside the building where we were to conduct an interview about the process they used to select a Catholic school for their daughter, Maria. As she arrived; she proceeded to get out of an older model car. We talked a bit and waited for her husband, who was coming from a job site outside of the city. When he finally arrived, he too was driving an older model truck. I later learned that they drove older model cars to be able to afford sending their daughter, Maria, to a Catholic school. Their daughter attended St. Mary's Catholic School. St. Mary's was a school operated by a religious order and focused PK to 3rd grade on a Montessori program. The school also offered a bilingual program and its student body was predominantly Catholic and Hispanic. The school offered a full band and arts program and an athletic program in its middle school.

Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza met through a blind date, a rather unusual one at that. Going back to the time they met focused on two different daycares, each operated by a mother, one who had two daughters and the other who had a son. These two mothers looked at each other and devised a way for their children to meet. One of these mothers was Mrs. Mendoza's mother. The mothers decided that there would be a blind date. Their children agreed, however, they would need to find another friend to make it a foursome. Mr. Mendoza became the fourth person to join the blind date; he called himself "the wing man." Mr. Mendoza was 30 years of age and Mrs. Mendoza was 24 when they met. They continued to see each other and were married a few years later.

Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza lived in the same neighborhood and attended the same church when growing up; although their paths never crossed. He was born into a family whose father

was Catholic and mother, a member of the Church of the Nazarene. At times, he attended the Catholic Church with his aunts, his father's sisters, but generally attended Church with his maternal grandparents since they were elders in their church. Mrs. Mendoza was born into a Catholic family.

Mrs. Mendoza attended a Catholic school until the eighth grade. In fact, she attended the same school where she would later teach and enroll her daughter, St. Mary's. She described her experience in Catholic schools as responsible for the tenants of her faith. Although baptized in the Catholic Church, she was never confirmed until, as an adult, she decided she would be. Mr. Mendoza attended public schools. His experience of the school was very negative. Bullying was rampant and he believed that over the years, the public school has gotten much worst. He insisted there was no way he was going to place his daughter in public schools. He did not want his daughter to be afraid of going to school, as he was. On the other hand, Mrs. Mendoza, who had attended Catholic schools, knew early on that her children would attend a Catholic school. When Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza dated, they decided that, if they would have children, the children would attend a Catholic school. The only hesitation was the question of whether they could afford it. This theme, scarcity of resources, would remain constant theme throughout their deliberation of which school their daughter Maria would attend.

Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza both earned bachelor and Master degrees in mechanical engineering. They had a family income of \$70,000. After they married, Mrs. Mendoza began to dislike her career and wondered whether it she should leave engineering and become a teacher in a Catholic school. In doing so, she would have to obtain alternative certification. She began taking classes and began looking at the alternative locations of Catholic schools within the diocese. Soon after, she left her engineering job and began teaching in a local Catholic school.

They would enroll their daughter into PK3 at the same school Catholic school she was teaching. She felt the Catholic school would be good for her and be good for her daughter.

Heritage

Mr. Mendoza was born of Mexican parents who immigrated into the United States, he a second-generation American. Mrs. Mendoza was born of parents born in the diocese, of parents who had come from Mexico, she a third-generation American. Living in a Hispanic household did not seem to stand out for either Mr. or Mrs. Mendoza. Both their parents spoke English and Spanish in the households, as did Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza. They describe their families as very faithful to their religious traditions but did not link those traditions to necessarily being Hispanic.

Mr. Mendoza credits his grandparents with the development of his faith. His maternal grandparents were the backbone of his faith; from his grandmother, and their strong dedication to the Nazarene faith. From his father's side, he received a scattering of the Catholic faith. He did not have much contact with his paternal grandparents whom he would sporadically see on weekends. They were not too close. As an adult, he knew that faith was important and began to look for a potential wife who was also faith-filled. "I always knew that if I found that special person, religion would have to be a part of my family. When I met (my wife), she started to tell me about being Catholic." When he met her, she invited him to attend classes to reaffirm their Catholic faith - Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, because she had not been confirmed. They were both confirmed. "We started listening, and little by little, I could see what it was about: God's will for us."

Mrs. Mendoza was raised by her paternal grandmother for a short while but credits her step mother for the foundation of her Catholic faith. Her mother died when she was three years old and soon after, was sent to live with her paternal grandmother until she was in kindergarten.

She would see her father on weekends. Her father soon met another woman whom he later married. Mrs. Mendoza was then in kindergarten. From then on, her stepmother would raise her and enrolled her into a Catholic school. Her stepmother was very active in the Catholic Church and had a large influence on her faith life. When Mrs. Palacios turned 24, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. This period was very difficult for her. Having arms jerking as she walked while shaking and not being able to see because she was losing her sight, she thought she would not overcome this infirmity. “I got to see a more healing side of my faith—some of the charismatic side, adoration, different things like that, healed me.” She turned to her faith and began attending church daily and became involved in the Catholic Charismatic movement. Her faith sustained her; the prayers she had learned at school and the constant faith of her stepmother were redemptive. By the time, she began dating her future husband, the medical doctors told her that she no longer had multiple sclerosis. Her desire to become a teacher in a Catholic school may have begun as early as then.

While attending two different Catholic schools as a child, Mrs. Mendoza did not particularly see those schools as having a Hispanic culture. Speaking about Hispanic images in the schools or even Hispanic traditions being shared with the students, Mrs. Mendoza responded, “No, I really do not know what that means.” Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza’s attention to the Catholic school focused on faith and academics. Mr. Mendoza liked “the teaching part, the religion part of the Catholic school. One on one teaching was better. The quality of students was better. Morality was also going to be big.”

The Journey to Choose a Catholic School

Considering a Catholic school for their daughter, Maria, Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza recalled the first time (before they were married) when they spoke about the Catholic school their

children would attend. Mrs. Mendoza had attended Catholic schools from prekindergarten to the eighth grade, first St. Mary's School and then, not being able to afford the tuition since it was expected to be paid at the start of the school year, her mother transferred her to Blessed Sacrament School.

Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza spoke of their commitment to Catholic schools but always wondered whether they would be able to afford the tuition of a Catholic school. Much of their desire for a Catholic school came from Mrs. Mendoza, who was a product of Catholic schools, and Mr. Mendoza, who was a product of public schools that he described as being "pretty bad." Mr. Mendoza added that he wanted his daughter to attend a Catholic school because, "that was the religion that we were going to follow."

The first Catholic school where Mrs. Mendoza obtained employment was St. Anthony Catholic School is a small school of 200 students, the principal had worked there for more than 20 years, and the school was affiliated with the parish. It was a school in need of repair; the building was old and the interior needed remodeling, although the cafeteria had been updated a few years prior. The teachers were dedicated but some had been there too long and had become very comfortable, doing the same old thing year after year; poor academics. Mrs. Mendoza wondered whether she would permit her daughter to remain. She was entering kindergarten the following year. In describing the school and looking down the hall, Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza would see the children walking in straight lines, forbidden to speak when walking down the hallways or even in the cafeteria. They concluded the environment stifled creativity. The school was also losing enrollment, nonetheless, the teachers forged on, in service to the children of the school.

When Maria was turning five, getting ready to start kindergarten, Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza began talking. The conversation was about their daughter turning five and whether they should start looking for another Catholic school. Leaving her there, in the same school Mrs. Mendoza taught, would certainly help their budget. However, they were uncertain if the school was the best one for her. They were not as comfortable with that school at that time. There were issues; lack of teaching, rigidity and a lack of “warm and fuzzy.” If Mrs. Mendoza would remain there as a teacher, perhaps they could tolerate the school. If Mrs. Mendoza could find employment in another Catholic school, kindergarten would certainly be better. Mr. Mendoza concluded, “Fortunately, we were blessed that my wife got a job at St. Mary’s. That opened up a new door for us”

Seeking a different Catholic school was rooted in wanting a better school for their daughter. Mrs. Mendoza applied for employment to the Archdiocese leading to a call from the St. Mary’s principal asking if she would be available for an interview. Proceeding to the interview, she was hired on the spot. Her daughter would soon attend. Mr. and Mrs. Martinez lived in the East side of town and commuted north to attend St. Anthony School. They would now need to travel to the northcentral part of the city; the same distance from their home than the previous school. St. Mary’s was a school that focused on the Montessori program from kindergarten to third grade. It would be a school where Maria would excel. It was also the same school Mrs. Mendoza attended when she turned five years of age.

As one enters St. Mary’s, there are stairs leading to the second floor and the main Chapel. The central focus when coming into the building is the beautiful chapel built at the turn of the 20th century. From there, hallways lead right and left with a statue of St. Mary’s gracing the hallways. The administrative offices are located on the second floor. The two distinctions,

from the previous school, traversing those hallways and looking into classrooms were crucifixes hung on the classroom walls and prayer corners with a statue of the Virgin Mary front and center. The children seem very happy and the climate is very open and friendly. The school's focus was a specialized Montessori program in kindergarten through the third grade.

Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza were very pleased with the prospect of their daughter attending what they considered an improvement in school environment and in academics from her previous school. By virtue of Mrs. Mendoza teaching at the school, she was eligible for a half-tuition grant which allowed them to enroll their daughter. After being notified of her employment, Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza proceeded to visit the school to see if it would be a good fit for Maria. When there, they began looking for what they called a sense of "the warm and fuzzy," which they attributed to a happy and accepting environment. The couple's decision to send their daughter to this school they described as "providential," with Mrs. Mendoza having secured employment in it. They could afford the tuition. In fact, conversing about their school choices, they eliminated other Catholic schools they considered having better academics, due to those having a higher tuition. Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza did not consider any other school and were equally involved in deciding that their daughter would attend St. Mary's.

Attending the open house at St. Mary's led to a very comfortable feeling and a place where they believed their daughter could be very happy. Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza described being in the school gym as the principal began the open house and speaking with teachers and students. When arriving at the school, they described the atmosphere as having a family environment; they could feel that the teachers cared. It did not feel cold and the tuition was right. They knew the academics were good and the opportunities for success would also be there. The comfort feeling sold them. Additionally, having had an opportunity to meet the

teachers, see students, know the curriculum, and have a conversation with the principal, sealed the deal. All of this convinced them to enroll their daughter. Emotion overcame Mrs. Mendoza, she shared, “I felt overall happiness, she [will be] able to learn her faith at school. You know, as much as we try to teach at home, it is just great to have that reinforcement. That makes a difference. I knew that she would get that in a Catholic school.”

When reviewing Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza’s journey to find an appropriate Catholic school, blessings abounded. In terms of who chose the school, it was Mrs. Mendoza’s instinct to search for a Catholic school with better academics. Mr. Mendoza confirmed the decisions along the way. As for gathering and using information about various school choices, their lack of developing a list of schools to consider was based on scarcity of resources; not being able to afford “better Catholic schools.” They sought some information about St. Mary’s by attending an “open house.” When considering negotiating between choices, they minimally did so. Since there was never a question of public school enrollment and affording tuition was the only dilemma, the visit to the “open house” assured that the new school would be adequate for their daughter. Having attended the same school while in kindergarten also provided Mrs. Mendoza a sense that the school would be acceptable’ “It was like coming home,” she said. Deciding to move away from the previous school, to another considered having better academics and a “warm and fuzzy” environment, was in fact the negotiation. Scarcity of resources and opportunity costs were factors. Opportunity costs meaning the exercise of forgoing maximum opportunities due to scarcity of resources. Constructs of the aggregation mechanism used by Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza in their journey to find a better Catholic school was mostly focused Mrs. Mendoza’s instinct to move from the previous school she taught and the decision to find another Catholic school; one with better academics and environment.

Vignette Three: Mr. and Mrs. Gomez

Background

When I met Mr. and Mrs. Gomez, they exuded a professional style and seemed somewhat private and aloof. They seemed committed to sharing about themselves but did so only after a large amount of prompting. They described their home and a glimpse into their home showed three children running around, age's five to eight. Their oldest son was named Diego, their oldest girl named Daniella, and their youngest son named Daniel. Their home was very large, with ample acreage, a swimming pool, and outdoor televisions. When the children got home, both parents helped with the homework, making dinner, and preparing the children for bed. They described that they enjoyed doing this together. They had three children and over the period of five years, they attended four schools; a Jewish day school for preschool, St. Mary's Catholic School, St. Henry's Catholic School and St. Ambrose Catholic School. The Jewish preschool was a small preschool of 100 with children of the Jewish and Catholic faiths. St. Mary's, as previously shared, was a school focusing on a Montessori program through the 3rd grade and traditional education thereafter. St. Henry's was a parish school that provided a traditional Catholic school program to a largely Hispanic population. St. Ambrose was a private Catholic school. It served 422 students, 80% of whom were Catholic and 73% Hispanic. The school offered a small sports program, band and did not offer bilingual education. The tuition was under \$8,000. The school was in an upscale neighborhood of the city.

Mr. and Mrs. Gomez live in a wealthy area of the city, have a very nice home, and earn more than many families whose children attend Catholic schools: about \$250,000. Mr. and Mrs. Gomez were both born in the diocese of Hispanic parents. Mr. Gomez's father was a public-school administrator and coach. His mother was a stay-at-home mom. Mrs. Gomez's father

worked for a phone company and her mother was a bookkeeper. Mrs. Gomez has a bachelor's degree in education, and Mr. Gomez has a master's degree in finance.

Mr. Gomez's perspective about schools was that he earned more than most people, and that since he was a product of public schools, public schools for his children "should be sufficient." Mrs. Gomez, on the other hand, challenged his proposition, and she, a product of a Catholic school, told him that "the Catholic school [would] bring faith, a mixture of proper friends, and a future." As a mother, she wanted her kids to be happy, which was her explanation for moving the children to four different Catholic schools over a period of five years. Mr. Gomez finally said, "I still wasn't convinced until later, and then I eventually got more involved in [my kids Catholic] school. Now I'm really involved. I want my kids to attend the Catholic school." Continuing our conversation, I learned that she enrolled the children in Catholic schools, against her husband's wishes. She simply believed Catholic schools would benefit her children and she relied on her "mother's intuition" to guide her thinking.

When Mrs. Gomez was growing up, she attended Catholic schools through college. In elementary, "The nuns were strict. They taught structure and that is something that she wanted for her children. The environment was nurturing. I learned values and morals from them." Mr. Gomez attended public school through high school and attended a Catholic college. This was where they met, enrolled in the same class; they decided to join a study group together. He described their relationship, as "comfortable," and was looking for "a good woman who did not do bad things. She was serious, sweet, focused." She described him as "a good guy, one who would be solid," especially after meeting his family.

In speaking about their own family, Mr. and Mrs. Gomez shared the notion of raising good children and hoping that they would not fail them. Mrs. Gomez shared: "I just hope we

don't fail them and that they're happy. Not so much successful financially or whatever, but just that they're happy. I just hope and pray that they're safe and happy and they can be gracious with themselves and their family." Mr. Gomez added: "I just want to them to be good people; good Christians, good Catholics. And, I think, growing up, we don't know how we've been blessed. I want to make sure they become good people."

Mr. and Mrs. Gomez seemed to know what they wanted for their family, children and their future. They cared deeply about each other and cared for their children very much. They hoped that their children would grow up to be responsible individuals and not necessarily spoiled by material wealth. During the period of their courtship, they never discussed the possibility of their future children attending Catholic schools.

Heritage

Mr. and Mrs. Gomez were born in the diocese, as were both their parents. Mr. Gomez's great-grandparents came from Mexico and settled in the diocese. His grandparents, parents, and he were born in the diocese, making him a fourth-generation American. Mrs. Gomez's grandparents came from Mexico and settled in the diocese where she and her parents were born. She is a third-generation American.

In conversing about his parents, Mr. Gomez found it difficult to remember where his parents and grandparents were born. It almost seemed as if he did not want to admit that his lineage began in Mexico. He described his father as very close to the Catholic Church, "especially since he was diagnosed as having leukemia." About his own faith, he continued, "My own faith got stronger when suffering a great deal in high school, and this led me to doing my first communion in high school, since my parents decided that I should do it when I could decide. From then on, my faith got better and stronger." As for his grandparents, he never knew them. Mrs. Gomez

seemed much more involved with her parents, sister, and brothers. She described them as being very close and an inspiration to her. As for her parents, they did not attend church much while growing up, although they sent her and her siblings to Catholic schools. Mrs. Gomez also shared that her grandmother moved back to Mexico when her grandfather died. Growing up, being Mexican American or Hispanic was not anything ever discussed in their family.

The Journey to Choose a Catholic School

This third vignette is one that could be considered an outlier from the others presented in this chapter. Its main protagonist is the mother of three children, whose husband does not agree that their children should attend Catholic school. This primarily because he believed that he, a product of public schools, was very successful and that the children would also be, because of attending public schools. Also interesting was that the children attended four schools, before Mrs. Gomez found one where she believed her children could be happy. They are also a very affluent family.

Before Mr. and Mrs. Gomez were married, they did not speak about which schools their future children would attend. Mr. and Mrs. Gomez have three children, and all attend a Catholic school, although their journey towards their enrollment was fraught with challenges.

Mrs. Gomez—having been a product of Catholic schools—had always considered Catholic schools to be the only choice of school for her children. Mr. Gomez, on the other hand, having been a product of public schools, had always believed that his children would attend public schools. He believed that since he turned out fine or “better” having attended public schools, his children would fare well also.

When Mr. and Mrs. Gomez began to have children and they became of school age, they were at odds over whether they should attend public schools or Catholic schools. At the end,

only one answer prevailed; Catholic schools. This choice was not the result of an agreement between Mr. and Mrs. Gomez; rather, it was simply a result of Mrs. Gomez's inclination and will. The couple was financially successful, which meant that money was no object. Finding a place where the children would be happy and would grow up to be responsible citizens was a motivating force behind placing the children in a Catholic school. Mrs. Gomez was also very concerned that placing them elsewhere would fail her children. She also worried about the choice of friends they would make and that they would be surrounded with good influences. Mr. Gomez was not in agreement that they should attend Catholic schools, not because they would not get a good education but because the money they would spend in Catholic schools should be placed in a fund to cover their future college expenses. When the time came, the children were enrolled in Catholic schools. From a Jewish daycare, which Mrs. Gomez began to feel was too homogeneous and elite; they transferred to St. Mary's since the school had a successful Montessori program. This school had more of the diversity that Mrs. Martinez was looking for but the school would eventually be one where they would leave since she wanted to have her two children, at the time, in the same school. St. Mary's school did not provide this opportunity. She would have enrolled both children into St. Henry's School, if she could have enrolled both children. At the time, the school would not. When St. Henry's became available for both children, she transferred them there. A few years later, because one of her children became very stressed and unhappy, she then transferred them to St. Ambrose Catholic School, a Catholic school where she believed her children could be happy. Having a third child of school age, she enrolled all three into St. Ambrose. Her best friend was a teacher at St. Ambrose and the fact that she was there became a great comfort for her children. Moving her children to different schools did not focus on any aspect of the school as being better than the other but

rather focused attention on her children being happy. Mrs. Gomez had an irrational belief that she would somehow fail her children if she could not find a school where they could be happy. At the end of the process, it seemed as if she had found the perfect school and one in which her husband finally agreed that the Catholic school was the appropriate school for their children.

A few years after Diego was born, and with Mrs. Gomez working as a teacher, they had a need to enroll him in daycare. After some consideration, Mrs. Gomez selected a Jewish school where the children seemed nice and, without revealing some prejudice, she said, “they came from good families.” All through her journey to move the children from school to school, she never moved her sights away from also finding schools where the families came from good background. She did not want her children growing up with friends who were not of their level. This Jewish daycare worked well, especially with the birth of their second child Daniella. Both attended this exclusive school. As Diego needed to enroll in kindergarten, Mrs. Gomez began to think about the possibility of moving both children to St. Mary’s. Mrs. Gomez was beginning to feel that the Jewish school was too homogeneous and that the Catholic school would provide for a more diverse population; it was also Catholic, the goal of her inclination. It became important to her that the children begin a more formal education in their faith and in prayers and that they are prepared for Holy Communion in second grade.

Being a teacher, Mrs. Gomez saw a mixture of students who came from various Catholic schools. As she came to know students from those various schools, she began to identify that students who came from schools were better students, had better habits, and had better attitudes than students from other Catholic schools. This became one of the main determinants of which Catholic school would be best for her children. After the Jewish school, she selected St. Mary’s. The school’s focus was a specialized Montessori program in kindergarten through the

third grade. This was where she believed her children would be happy, get a great education and learn about their faith. In making the decision, she consulted her husband who told her that the children should attend public schools. In the interim, she did not seek any information from the Internet or avail herself of any information from the school. She spoke to some friends and colleagues about the school and soon proceeded to enroll her children there. She would have considered moving the children to St. Henry's School, but St. Henry's would not have enrolled Daniella due to her age, so she decided to enroll them at St. Mary's. St. Henry's school was a more affluent Catholic school and the students entering high school from there were the most prepared of the Catholic high schools in town. This seemed to be important to her; high academics, high affluence and good families. With her husband, still against the idea of sending them to a Catholic school, moving her children provided some stress to their relationship as he was focused on not spending on Catholic school tuition. Not that they could not afford but that he did not want to spend.

The children spent two years at St. Mary's, and since Daniella was going to enter kindergarten, Mrs. Gomez decided that she would move both children to St. Henry's. She moved the children to St. Mary's to have them together in one school. She again did this without seeking any information from the Internet or the school. She went to the school and enrolled the children for the following year. It seemed like a great fit. As the new year progressed, Daniella began to deal with anxiety about attending school. The classroom was very structured, and she became afraid of the teacher. The teacher was alienating her daughter more and more every day. Something needed to be done. Diego and Danielle continued at the school until the end of the year.

Focused at the increased anxiety of her daughter and her unhappiness, Mrs. Gomez began to think about which school she would transfer the children to. She now had a third child who would also need a school. Convinced of the positivity of Catholic school values, she turned her attention to another Catholic school, St. Ambrose Elementary School. It helped Daniella that her mother's best friend worked as a teacher at the school. Having her mother's best friend close by was something that helped with the children's transition. The three children were enrolled, against their father's wishes. He did however establish an ultimatum: if the children were to be moved again, they would be attending public schools.

At present, St. Ambrose Catholic School meets Mrs. Gomez's requirements and is a school that Mr. Gomez has also become satisfied with. After a conversation about his adamant stand in favor of public schools, he shared, "I do want my kids in a Catholic school." In the process of deciding which school their children would attend, it was clear that Mr. Gomez finally understood what his wife had been telling him all along; the Catholic school is the better choice in terms of faith, academics and friends the children will embrace.

In summary, Mr. and Mrs. Gomez were often at odds about the school their children would attend from the beginning. As a product of Catholic schools, Mrs. Gomez wanted their children to attend Catholic schools, while Mr. Gomez, as a product of public schools, wanted their children to attend public schools. The battle continued until Mrs. Gomez put her foot down and enrolled their children in Catholic schools, contrary to Mr. Gomez's desire. While selecting particular Catholic schools, she did not seek information from the Internet and instead sought the opinion of her friends and colleagues and talked with high school students who had attended the Catholic schools she was considering. Although she sought some information about the school, she did not seek information comprehensively and rather relied on hot

knowledge information only. Mrs. Gomez did not avail herself of any. No lists were initially developed; she sought only hot knowledge information from her friends and colleagues and although sharing many conversations with her husband, did not come to any agreement with him while negotiating which school the children would attend. I remain in wonder about the tenacity of this mother, who against her husband's wishes, remained convinced about the inherent values she believed in; that the Catholic school would provide for a better education, provide a faith dimension not available in public schools and embrace a group of friends that would be good for her children. At the end of our interview, Mr. Gomez informed me that they were going out on a date. Whatever difficulties this process of school selection may have engendered between them, this couple seemed very connected and happy with them on this day. Theirs was also an unconventional process.

Vignette Four: Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez

Background

Meeting Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez for the first time was delightful. Both involved in the counseling field, they were reflective and willing to talk about their daughter, their family life, and their journey towards finding St. Mary's Catholic School. As previously shared, St. Mary's was a school operated by a religious order and focused PK to 3rd grade on a Montessori program. The school also offered a bilingual program and its student body was predominantly Catholic and Hispanic. The school offered a full band and arts program and an athletic program in its middle school.

Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez were born in the diocese, he of parents born in the United States and she of parents born in Mexico. She was a second-generation and he a third-generation American. Giving me a glimpse into how they met, they were in front of a movie theater where

each was waiting in line to get a ticket. After a slight “hello” from behind her, she turned and said hello also. “It felt like someone I had known for a long time, and I felt very comfortable.” She was surprised since in her past relationships, there seemed to always be awkwardness. Upon meeting, they felt like they’d already known each other, and it just felt right. Three years later, they were married.

Mr. Gonzalez’s childhood was a difficult one. His parents seemed focused on religion but felt their focus was superficial. His two stepsisters became alcoholic and therefore did not spend much time with him. His father worked, as did his mother, but she too was an alcoholic, and his parents were somewhat absent, neither spent much time with him. He lived in a rough neighborhood, just as his father had, twenty-five years prior. He and his father were out on their own when they were 12 years of age. There were some teachers that Mr. Gonzalez attributed his good sense to, who made it a point of looking out for him as well as to some aunts and uncles who came around from time to time. As an adult, he chose to embrace certain aspects of his childhood and forget the rest. His embracing of his childhood was almost nonexistent. He did not know his grandparents, either.

Mrs. Gonzalez came from a Mexican American household that was always focused on raising her and her sister close to her Catholic faith. Both sisters attended Catholic schools through high school. She attributed their closeness to the Catholic Church as having come from her maternal grandmother who was very involved in church retreats and the like. Her parents were also very strict with them and she learned to be accountable, thus.

Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez had both earned master degrees in counseling. They both worked in the counseling profession and had a family income of \$80,000. Mrs. Gonzalez learned from her father that hard work never killed anybody; this was his motto. From her

mother, she learned that marriage was like a leap of faith “because you never knew what was going to happen.” When Mrs. Gonzalez got married, her mother spoke to her about marriage and how she needed to be ready for almost anything, “Maybe it was more from a Latino standpoint—you have to be more independent; you can’t rely on a man to take care of you. Marriage is about compromise, communication.”

Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez had many goals for their daughter and hoped that she could exceed their current continence. “After all,” they said, “isn’t it the goal that our children do better than we did? [We want her] to earn more than a master’s degree and to be proud of her heritage.” Mrs. Gonzales continued to describe what she told her daughter: “There are people that don’t have what you have, and we have to be aware of that and whatever opportunity you have to help someone that’s less fortunate than us. That’s the way we’re going to live our life.” She expected her daughter to understand and be sensitive to the needs of others.

Considering their after-school procedure, they described grandmother picking Bella from school and taking her to her own house until Bella’s dad could pick her up and take her home. The school was 45 minutes from where they lived. Selecting the Catholic school Bella attended had little to do with proximity and was mostly related to being the right fit, having a pleasant feel, and having the correct blend of students. When Bella entered her grandmother’s home in the afternoon, there was time for a little snack, some play with her grandmother, and some simple relaxation. The grandparents called Bella “our shining star” and treated her like that as well. Six weeks after Bella was born, her grandmother began caring for her. Mr. Gonzales dropped her off at 7:00 a.m. and picked her up at 6:00 p.m. This was the daily routine until Bella was ready for prekindergarten. Bella going to her grandma’s home after school seemed as

natural as going into her own home. Her grandma was very much a part of her life and that of her parents.

Mrs. Gonzales described her daughter in the following way: “She’s blessed. She’s very articulate for a 5-year-old. I think she’s very intelligent. She knows what she wants, and she already has dreams. She wants to do stuff. I enjoy that.” That was one of the reasons they wanted her to attend a Catholic school.

Heritage

Being Mexican American and the fact that her father had immigrated from Mexico, was a point of pride for Mrs. Gonzalez, something she always reminded her daughter of. Mrs. Gonzalez’s parental home was small, although large enough where each sister had their own bedroom. With her father, having immigrated from Mexico, they had enough but not any more than they needed. He married her wife, soon after coming to the United States. She had been born in the United States. At first, her father worked for the State of Texas as an electrician, drove an older truck, and was out most of the day into the late evening. He was very proud of his Mexican heritage, and this was something Mrs. Gonzalez kept repeating to her daughter. He was always dedicated to his family and his work. When her father left Mexico to come to the United States, his father advised, “You’re going to go to the United States, you’re going to work. Don’t go if you don’t want to work; you must work hard. He raised us like that. He had a very strong work ethic.” Education was important in her family, especially with her father, because he didn’t have these opportunities when he was a kid. She and her sister always wanted to make their father proud. They lived in a three-bedroom and modest home, on the south side of the city and had their own rooms.

As for Mr. Gonzalez, he did not have the best relationship with his parents, because they seemed to be in and out of his life. Today, they are not around. Although he was raised in a Mexican American household, it was really being raised in the Mexican American neighborhood that defined his actions as an adult. He raised himself through his early years and finished school because some good teachers watched out for him. He described his adult years as ones in which he had to learn to pick the good things that happened to him and choose to forget the rest. Being a counselor helped him sort through his childhood experiences. Being of Hispanic heritage was very clear to him, and being Hispanic in his neighborhood meant staying out late, taking his own life into his own hands as early as thirteen and trying to make it through the maze of the streets he hung around while growing up.

In searching for a school for Bella, Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez's family backgrounds came to the forefront. His experience in a public school left so much to desire. He remembered the public school as lacking in so many ways and his current job as a counselor has convinced him that their daughter would be better off attending a Catholic school. In speaking with her husband, Mrs. Gonzalez spoke about Catholic schools before their daughter was born; both agreed Bella would not be attending a public school. Cognizant of their economic condition, not being able to afford a fully "private school," as they termed it, they believed they would be able to afford a midlevel Catholic school. Looking for a structured school and one where cultural traditions were celebrated, they began their search. They also looked for a school that had a pleasant feel, which they termed "warm and fuzzy." They found a Catholic school 45 minutes from their home, although there were plenty of Catholic schools on the Southside of town, only a few miles from their home and their work. Mrs. Gonzalez had attended one of these Catholic schools, and although she termed the school "acceptable," she remembered the pastor of the

school not allowing teachers to be creative with their students. Additionally, they looked for a Catholic school whose academic and programmatic stature was a little higher than the school she had attended.

The Journey to Choose a Catholic School

Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez daughter attended St. Mary's Catholic School. It provided education from PK2 to grade 8. Upon entering the school, the stairs go to the second floor, where visitors are met by the school's chapel, built at the start of the 20th century. To the left and right are hallways leading to the administrative offices. On the ground floor are the Montessori classrooms and the school's gym. There is a statue of St. Mary's next to the chapel and crucifixes and altars in each classroom.

Recalling a conversation Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez had, soon after Bella was born, Mrs. Gonzales told her husband that she wanted to send their children to a Catholic school like the school she had attended. Mrs. Gonzalez agreed; he believed Bella would not attend a public school due to his bad experience attending one, especially his middle and high school years. It would come down to whether they could afford Catholic schools. Additionally, since Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez worked in the social work field as counselors, their experience with students coming out of public schools influenced their belief that they needed to shield their daughter from that experience. Additionally, Mom has sense of religion and morals in Catholic schools. She believed Catholic schools held students accountable. She also wanted her daughter to receive her sacraments; confession and first communion. She believed the sense of being Catholic led to generosity of spirit. This was important to her. Mr. Gonzalez believed private meant a better education. Catholic meant religious. He used both words interchangeably.

When considering schools for Bella, they instinctively invited the maternal grandmother to help in the process. Her mother had taken care of Bella since she was 6 months old, and she would provide special insight in determining whether some schools would be good for their daughter. They sought a school that was Catholic, with ethnic and economic diversity and a good educational program and one where their daughter could have a pleasant experience. It was interesting that the maternal grandmother visited every school Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez considered and was involved in the discussion about whether the schools would be a good match for Bella.

When Bella turned 4 years old, Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez began searching for a school that their daughter could attend. A glimpse into their thinking process provided a well-thought-out protocol. As they sat and discussed this protocol, they first considered the school Mrs. Gonzalez had attended. She described the school as small with old buildings, and she still remembered the teachers not being allowed to be creative with the curriculum without the permission of the pastor. Although this had been 25 years prior, she still believed the school would be as she remembered it, and she wanted a little bit more for her daughter. Mrs. Gonzalez wanted more for her daughter. At first, she did not understand why it was so important, but decided to pass on her childhood school. Later she would say that it seemed as if they were going back, if they enrolled her daughter in that school.

Eliminating that one school located on the south side of town, they began searching for schools, far from where they lived, and on the north side of the city. These schools generally had a wider profile in terms of program offerings and better general conditions. They considered three schools: St. Paul's Catholic School, St. Luke's Catholic School and St. Mary's. In doing so, they asked grandmother to find out as much as she could about those schools. Mr.

Gonzalez looked at the Internet and the various websites that detailed the school programs and tuition. In the process of seeking information, they asked the grandmother to call another school on the north side whose program was generally considered better than the programs in the other schools they were considering. The school was a little more expensive, but they wanted to just see if it was within their range. The grandmother, having called to seek information and ask about open house dates, was told that they generally did not respond to grandparents and that the parents would have to be the ones soliciting information. This school did not seem to understand the role of the extended family in Mexican American homes. Grandmother felt as if they were prejudice against her because she was of Mexican descent. When grandma reported this conversation, Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez felt insulted and discriminated against, believing what was rumored, the school catered to a more elitist clientele.

Having the necessary information about the schools they preselected, Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez and the grandma proceeded to visit the three schools. They received cold knowledge information from the websites of the schools and hot knowledge from speaking to a few parents and from teachers at the open houses during the process of choosing which school their daughter would attend. They had also gone on their websites, seen their curriculum, what they were working on, and the amount of activities each school had. Activities were an important part of their search. While visiting the first two schools, the schools did not exhibit a unified concept of school; faith, academic and activities. In the last school, they saw the curriculum, the schedule, the philosophy of teaching and what they should expect when a student graduated from that school.

St. Paul was a combination of old buildings; some being remodeled and very small. Two students conducted their tour. These students were not able to answer all the questions Mr. and

Mrs. Gonzalez had. St. Paul's sits on the west side of the city, in one of the poorest neighborhoods. The school serves an overwhelmingly Hispanic population and has given many children upward mobility opportunities. They just did not have the resources to provide marketing materials that other Catholic schools, with more resources, can produce. The school depends on the parishioners to fill the seats at St. Paul's Catholic School. Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez left disappointed that more information was not provided, not even a brochure about the school. Mother, father, and grandmother agreed to take the school off their initial list. On another day, mom and grandma arrived at St. Luke's for another tour. The school was larger than they expected and had programs galore, even a very active sports program. There was a discussion among others at the tour however, that parishioners got admission preferences. It seemed as if all the people on tour were competing for 20 [PK4] spots. They described the school as steep in tradition and very generational; parishioners who came from a long lineage, grandmother, mother, daughter... and felt like it'd be a long shot they would get a spot there. Thus, the mother and grandmother discounted that school soon after they left the tour.

The third school they visited felt right from the beginning. They had called St. Mary's Catholic school and were informed there would be an open house and were given the date and time. The next day, they received a phone call from a parent at the school, asking them if they had any questions before they visited the school. This was followed by an email that welcomed them, provided some information about the school, and helped them feel like they were already a part of the school. As mom, dad and grandparents proceeded to visit the school the following week, all were very excited. They were met at the door and invited into the gym where the open house would begin. They were given an explanation about the curriculum and programs and then given an opportunity to speak with classroom teachers. This was important in that they had

an opportunity to speak with their daughter's future teachers. They were also given an opportunity to visit with eighth-grade students who were moving on into Catholic high schools. Mr. Gonzalez was very impressed by meeting them above all other information received. They were also given all sorts of brochures and information to take home. This school had provided an extensive open house. Then they wondered whether there would be availability. Waiting, they met with the school principal. She did not say very much but the fact that they had an opportunity to meet the leader of the school impressed them very much. As they left the building, walking down the sidewalk; they were convinced. Grandma then said, "I hope you pick this school." When they visited this school, they found everything they were looking for: a place where their daughter could find happiness, diversity, activities, and a "warm and fuzzy" environment. Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez had consulted the Internet about the costs of the various schools they considered. An ability to afford tuition was certainly part of the reason these schools were listed as ones to visit.

In summary, Mr. and Mrs. Gonzales was the only couple of the six couples in this study, to follow a more traditional process of school selection. They spoke about placing their children in Catholic schools soon after their daughter was born. They began to consider schools by browsing the Internet and seeking information about three schools. Their choice of school was restricted by what they could afford, despite knowing that some schools would provide a better education than others. They developed a hierarchy of preferences and placed three schools on their list to visit. There were no negotiations in this process because visiting each school provided an understanding of whether the school would be acceptable or not. Upon visiting the last school, they realized that it had everything they were looking for, including the fact that the maternal grandmother approved of it. They identified the visit to the school and conversation

with the principal as the most important part of the process of school selection. They were looking for a place where their daughter could be happy, where the academics were good and where the atmosphere was friendly and family oriented. They limited their choice to just three Catholic schools, accepting their limited financial condition as part of their scarcity of resources.

Vignette Five: Mr. and Mrs. Rangel

Background

Arriving at the interview first, Mr. Rangel and I waited until his wife arrived. She came in 15 minutes late and arrived seemingly distracted with text messages on her phone. She shared that she was very busy and apologized for needing to check her messages. Mr. Rangel worked out of his home as an insurance supervisor while Mrs. Rangel worked outside the home, in the same profession. Mr. and Mrs. Rangel come across as consummate professionals; dynamic, articulate and high powered. Their son, Anthony was enrolled in kindergarten and another son in PK3. Both attended Holy Rosary Catholic School. As shared in the first vignette, Holy Rosary was a school formally operated by a religious order whose charism followed a more orthodox and traditional school program. The school offered bilingual education, especially for Mexican Nationals enrolled in the school. The school also had an advanced band and arts program and its athletic program offered a full set of sports, especially in the middle school.

Mr. and Mrs. Rangel met at their place of employment. He was the star of the company as the top salesperson. While Mr. Rangel gave the sales department a presentation on being successful in the business, Mrs. Rangel noticed he was very polished and quickly understood he knew what he was talking about. So, taken by him, she approached, asked him whether he was single, and proceeded to ask if he would accompany her to a company event. He said yes, and

the rest was history. The months passed, and knowing that he wanted a family and that she was unable to have children, Mrs. Rangel thought they would date a short while and go their own ways. Their lives did not exactly turn out that way; she found herself expecting her first child some months later. Seeming to want to apologize for their relationship, Mr. Rangel interrupted the conversation at this point and said, “We did it a little bit backwards. Fell in love, got pregnant, she moved into my house, had 2 boys. We’ve been married for almost a year now.”

Mr. and Mrs. Rangel were born in the diocese, to Mexican American parents. They both completed a bachelor degree and had a family income of \$90,000. As children, Mr. Rangel attended Catholic schools through the eighth grade and then transferred to a public school, whereas Mrs. Rangel attended public school all the way through high school.

Talking about their children and what they do after coming home from school, they described their afterschool routine. On any given afternoon, the Rangel boys could be seen coming home, with their mom or dad or grandmother. Their grandmother played a dominant role in the lives of the Rangel family. Asked about his school day, Anthony would often respond, “I got into trouble.” He would also share who was absent, who was sick, and what he learned. One day, he had been the door holder and shared how he liked to be the leader of the class. Each afternoon, he would empty his backpack and show them a library book; he brought one home every day. Sometimes he would share he had learned some new Spanish words or show his artwork, if he had any. Anthony was in kindergarten and his brother is in PK3. The Rangel’s described their son Anthony as “very charismatic, very analytical, loving to talk to people” and believe “Anthony is going to be president of the United States.”

Continuing to describe the after-school routine, Mr. and Mrs. Rangel shared that Anthony’s next task would be to go to his room and put away his uniform. Sometimes he was

not able to complete the task and left the clothes on the floor in the closet. They also described his bedroom as a small room and one he shared with his brother. They live in a two-bedroom home; Mr. and Mrs. Rangel wished they could purchase a larger house. In trying to afford tuition payments at Holy Rosary, their plan to move into a larger home was just not feasible. Mr. Rangel wished that their sons could have their own room, have their own space. Friends would come over and they would have to “hang out outside because our living room’s not that big.” Affording Catholic school seemed to be a great sacrifice for them.

Mr. and Mrs. Rangel spoke about their lives, their story about Anthony and then a few regrets. After being pregnant for three months, their doctor shared his opinion that they should abort Anthony and after several amniocenteses, the tests confirmed the doctors’ opinion, however, they decided to continue with the pregnancy. They would accept any child that God would send. When Anthony was born, they felt “thankful and blessed.” As their son continued to grow healthily, another was on his way, they never married. That was their first regret. Their second regret was that their children were not yet baptized. She had always wanted to get married but it was always a matter of finances. They wanted to be more stable.

Sending their sons to a Catholic school was not their idea. In fact they really did not embrace the thought. The paternal grandmother brought the idea forth and continued to insist; she attended Catholic schools as a child. They would have sent their children to a public school, if left to their own devices. From the start of our conversation, I wondered why a dynamic, articulate and high powered couple could not simply say no to the paternal grandmother. However, it is not uncommon in Mexican American households. They described the grandmother as smart and very savvy with finances. At one point, they told me that their children would be set for life, since all his parent’s wealth, would become his children’s

inheritance. When examining the dynamic of not being able to say no to the grandmother, Mr. Rangel denied that the inheritance had anything to do with it. In fact, Mrs. Rangel added, “Ms. Rangel (grandmother) is the matriarch of our family. I respect her position. I go easy. Whatever she wants, that's fine with me.” At the end, it turns out that their inability to afford tuition was at the root of their discomfort in enrolling their children in a Catholic school. Although the paternal grandmother also insisted that she would pay the Catholic tuition for both grandsons, Mr. and Mrs. Rangel believed in the notion of “if you can’t afford it, you shouldn’t buy it.” They also related this notion to the paying of Catholic school tuition themselves.

As they continued sharing, to provide some justification that they did not want to enroll in a Catholic school, they told the grandmother of their belief that the children should not attend a Catholic school because they were not married. This did not convince his mother. Mrs. Rangel explained: “If we’re sending [them] to a Catholic school, we should be married.” Mr. Rangel added, “That’s right [this] was the number-one decision why we did not send [Anthony] to PK3. When it came time to enroll in pre-K4 ... of course, my mother [Mr. Rangel’s mother] was pushing very hard.”

This, however, was not the end of the story. Mr. Rangel’s mother continued to insist that her grandchildren attend a Catholic school and holy Rosary. She would not take no for an answer.

Heritage

Mr. and Mrs. Rangel were born of Mexican American parents; he was a second-generation American and she a third. Mr. Rangel’s father was born in Mexico, where he “walked to school in the cold and really never had good shoes. His pants were always tight or loose fitting.” He was always working and never had time to spend with the family. He worked

on a local farm and the only “good” thing that may have come from that job was that his employer provided him a truck to help him do his job. He could bring the truck home, and this helped the family get around when they needed to. Mr. Rangel’s mother was born in the diocese and worked for the State as an accountant. Over time, she did very well and was able to put much of what she earned into savings. Mr. Rangel’s mother came from an educated family and had a broader sense of life’s possibilities. His parents married life was spent somewhat frugally, even though they made sure their son was educated in a Catholic school. When Mr. Rangel was 10 years old, he started a lawn mowing business, a business he continued as an adult, in addition to receiving a pension from a former insurance company he worked for. As his father got older and to keep busy, continues to help him with his grass cutting business. This also helps Mr. Rangel come up with money to “cover the extras.”

In describing his mother, Mr. Rangel spoke of how she was the brains of the family. As an accountant, she learned to save, especially the bonuses she received every year. She was the matriarch of the family. She was also very dedicated to her faith and the Catholic Church. On Sunday mornings, grandmother would play music for them, always Mexican music, since his father was a fan of that music. This is how the family learned to dance. Mr. Rangel had a deep affection and admiration for his mother. Although 39 years of age, described his mother with great affection and said more than a few times, “My mother is my biggest believer.”

In describing her parents, Mrs. Rangel shared that her parents worked very hard and wanted her to get the very best education they could provide. They also lived a frugal life. They did not attend church service on Sunday, much, even though they were Catholic. Living on the south side of the city, where public schools were considered lacking, her parents moved to the north side, shrugging off their family and friends’ jeers that they wanted to become like

“those on the north side,” more Anglo and wealthy. Her father and mother both worked in city jobs, and were second-generation Americans.

Mr. and Mrs. Rangel shared that growing up in Hispanic families was a given. Being Hispanic was just part of the milieu. There was an understanding that both families were Mexican American and what would prevail in the future was the ethos of family and the notion that hard work and education. This would help them persevere. However, in describing his life as a father, a model for his son, and the head of the household, Mr. Rangel emphasized, and his wife concurred, that he still felt he had to prove himself as a Hispanic. In his place of employment, there were just two Mexican Americans. Mr. Rangel made sure that he always wore his college ring to show them, that people should not speak down to him. Being a college graduate in his field of sales was not always the norm and his ring represented the notion that he was educated. He also, always figured that he would have to work a little harder. He believed that across every culture, there were always people who wanted to put others down. As a Hispanic, he was very aware of this.

The Journey to Choose a Catholic School

Mr. and Mrs. Rangel had two sons enrolled at Holy Rosary Catholic School. The Catholic school was not particularly their first choice. Mr. Rangel’s mother always insisted that her grandsons attend a Catholic school. As they began their journey of what school their children would attend, they were conflicted; between their desires and the desire of the children’s paternal grandmother. They also wondered whether they could afford Catholic schooling.

It was a sacrifice to send them to the Catholic school and they knew it would become a problem in the future. Sending their sons to a Catholic school was something the grandmother wanted. Mr. Rangel felt caught between his mother and his wife and felt pressured to do what

his mother wanted. Mrs. Rangel went along with the plan of respect for her mother-in-law and to “keep the peace,” as she said. It was interesting that early in our conversation, Mrs. Rangel shared that her husband was the head of the household, and, as such, she always accepted his decisions. Upon being prompted for more of an explanation, she became frustrated and blurted, “I did it to keep the peace.” Finally, we were getting to what really happened; Mrs. Rangel buckled to the pressure. As she shared this information, she seemed disturbed and dejected. The grandmother got her way. It was an astonishing revelation, taking responsibility for something she did not embrace, in the first place.

Going back to the time when Anthony was in daycare, Mr. and Mrs. Rangel felt content that there were two very good public schools close to their home. With Anthony, still being in daycare, they knew they had some time to consider their decision. When Anthony turned two, Mr. Rangel’s mother mentioned to them that there was a Catholic school next to the daycare Anthony attended. She shared that they should attend the Catholic school. Even though they knew grandmother could be persistent, they believed they could ride out the issue. As grandmother continued, their first pushback to her was that they were not married and that it would not be correct to send their children to a Catholic school. Being faced with the reality of the situation, the grandmother stopped pushing.

A year and some months later, Mr. and Mrs. Rangel decided to marry, not for any reason other than they were ready to proceed with their lives. Since Mrs. Rangel had been previously married in the Catholic Church, they would be married by the justice of the peace. Soon after their wedding, grandmother began to suggest once again that it was time to consider enrolling their children in Holy Rosary.

As they debated, they were coming to a more concrete understanding they did not want their sons “siloed” because the Catholic school might be too narrow in their exposure to the problems of the world, as they believed. They wanted their sons to see the world as it was, so that they, themselves, could develop an understanding of how the world really worked. Mrs. Rangel worried about their “survival.” She had learned to keep herself safe and figured out how to survive and shared, “I’m afraid that with this environment, [Anthony] is not going to have the survival skills that he needs for life.” She saw the world as a “very rough and tough place.” In addition, how to pay Catholic school tuition was at the forefront of their discussion. Even though they knew that the grandmother would cover the tuition, they were of the conviction that if they were unable to afford something, they should not buy it. This extended to the notion of Catholic school tuition.

While continuing the debate, Mr. Rangel shared that he felt caught between the desires of his mother and those of his wife. He was hoping to find a way to break the impasse and one day, stopped by Holy Rosary to see the school and inquire about enrolling his sons. He was pleased with the visit and brought home some brochures. Mrs. Rangel, understanding that her husband was caught in a tough place and knowing that the conversation had stalled out, finally told him, “Let’s go ahead and give it a try. I guess the buy-in is, even if I don’t agree we both had to be supportive. I said, “I will support the school. I’ll go on the field trips. I’ll participate.” As she shared this information with me, I heard Mr. Rangel, in a quiet voice, “I still didn’t believe in that but okay. [My mom], she’s a huge influence in our boys’ lives.” Perhaps he meant to say that his mother had a huge influence on his life.

Speaking about finances, Mr. Rangel always preceded his wife in answering those types of questions saying, “I can handle that one, if you don’t mind.” Since scarcity of resources was a

concern, I attempted to drill down and understand their situation more concretely. Mr. Rangel shared, “Yeah. I actually broke down everything that we pay to the ...” to which Mrs. Rangel enjoined, “to the penny.” He continued, “... to what we were making ... to the penny ... and even thought about groceries and the electrical bill. Let's take an average of being 75 this month and 200 this month ... let's take that all down. I broke it all down and said, "Okay, we can afford it but, it's going to be tight." Suddenly, Mrs. Rangel broke the standstill and Mr. Rangel understanding it was a move forward, acknowledged that they would be able to afford the school's tuition, even though he knew it would be difficult. Towards the end of our interview, Mr. Rangel asked if he could add another point that he had forgotten. He remembered calling his sister and asking her about Catholic schools. His question was about Catholic schools always asking parents for money. He wanted to know how much he should be planning for. His sister's response explained the nature of Catholic schools and how tuition did not always cover the cost. Then a rejoinder that I found interesting since it would be the last point of the interview, "I still don't believe in that, but okay."

Once Mr. and Mrs. Rangel knew they would be sending their children to Holy Rosary, they focused on Holy Rosary exclusively. Their comments about two other Catholic schools were never mentioned again. St. Henry's, the school Mr. Rangel had attended as a kid, would not have been adequate since the pastor drove a Cadillac; “not a good example,” Mr. Rangel said. St. Matthews had been taken off the list because the school seemed to be having problems from information they received.

As they toured the school more formally, different from the time Mr. Rangel stopped by to find out if the school had room for his sons, the admissions director was very accommodating and friendly toward them and their son Anthony. She made Anthony feel at home and very

much a part of the family. She also praised Anthony for his maturity and smile. This was what they reported as having made the difference. Their conversation with the principal also helped to confirm what they had read on the Internet. When asked what, it was about Holy Rosary that convinced them it would be a good school for their son, Mrs. Rangel shared that it was the conversation with the admissions dean who made them feel so comfortable and the conversation with the principal; “he filled in all the gaps.” At the end, it was also “the offerings of the school.” Mrs. Rangel then shared, “It definitely wasn’t the school itself. We went in; we found 20 violations ... OSHA violations and safety violations.” This last comment may have been some residual anger over being placed able to accept enrolling her son in a Catholic school.

In summary, the process used by Mr. and Mrs. Rangel was unconventional. Without because the paternal grandmother pressured them into enrolling their children in the Catholic school, the process was still unconventional. Mrs. Rangel, at the end, ultimately said yes, even if it was to “keep the peace,” as she had previously stated. It was clear that the process was directed by the paternal grandmother. They sought little information. Not making an initial list of schools to consider, they did not seek any information about any other school nor of Holy Rosary before they visited the school. They had been given some information by the grandmother as she continued to pressure them into enrolling their children in the Catholic school. Scarcity of resources as demonstrated by their apprehension about whether they could afford the school was certainly very present as they considered whether to accept the paternal grandmother’s wishes. Although the debate (negotiations) was ultimately between Mr. and Mrs. Rangel, the pressure coming from the paternal grandmother was stronger than any of the other pressures they may have felt; certainly, not being able to afford the tuition. There was also an

innate connection between Mr. Rangel and his mother, the notion that “my mother [was] my greatest believer” that would prevail.

Vignette Six: Mr. and Mrs. Esparza

Background

As I awaited Mr. and Mrs. Esparza’s arrival, the door opened and in they came with their two daughters, ages 5 and 3. The five-year-old’s name was Alice. The girls were both enrolled in Holy Rosary Catholic School. As shared in earlier vignettes, Holy Rosary was a school formally operated by a religious order. Their charism, still present, provided for a more orthodox and traditional schooling than more of its counterparts on the diocese. The school also was predominantly of Hispanic background and had a large percentage of Mexican National children enrolled. The school offered a bilingual program, band and arts program and an athletic program. The school was also affiliated with a local high school within the diocese. As we talked in the conference room, the two girls remained in the lobby, and a glass wall separated us. They read a book and played some video games. They were perhaps the best-behaved pair of sisters I had witnessed in a long time. Mr. and Mrs. Esparza were of the belief that not everyone could be admitted into Catholic schools thus, that they were so fortunate at having their two daughters attend Holy Rosary Catholic School.

Mr. and Mrs. Esparza were born in towns a few hours outside of the diocese, she in a city with waves coming onto the shore and he in a town with one blinking light slowing traffic as it passed the main square. They were born to Mexican American parents whose parents had immigrated to the United States. They were both third-generation Mexican Americans who earned bachelor’s degrees. Their family income was \$100,000. She was an occupational

therapist and he worked in home health care. They had both earned master's degrees in their respective fields.

Mr. and Mrs. Esparza met at their place of employment. Mrs. Esparza shared that as he walked in the door, she noticed him walk by without even saying hello. She continued her work as other colleagues began to whisper and ask who he was. Weeks later, while Mrs. Esparza was out with friends, they met again and their relationship flourished from that point on. She was 31 years of age. A year before, when she was turning 30 years of age, she had begun to believe that it was time to get her life in order. She had begun to pray for God to send her someone worthy enough to marry and have a life with. After dating for a few weeks, they discovered they lived in the same apartment complex. They continued to get to know each other and married some years later and soon began a family. Continuing to work, they placed Alice in an upscale daycare, and as she was turning five years old and her sister was three, they enrolled them at Holy Rosary Catholic School. They described the Catholic school as a great fit.

In sharing the girl's afterschool routine, they described the girls getting home with mom, having picked them up from school, driving into the garage and the daughters quickly getting out of the car and running into the house. Before arriving at the house, they would have already reviewed their day with mom. The conversation generally focuses on what color Alice had earned that day and who in the classroom had gotten into trouble. Alice seemed to always share about the others getting into trouble to justify her color. Her mother described her as very honest and shared that the color scheme at school goes from blue to yellow to orange to red. On the day on the interview, Alice says, "I almost got a yellow but I cleaned it up." As therapists, Mr. and Mrs. Esparza emphasize structure and discipline and an opportunity to begin again. Mrs. Esparza emphasized, "Her teachers do a really good job of, whatever it was that got us to

the point of almost yellow, they scratch that and say 'Let's move on.' Let's try to get better to the end of the day.'" They are very content with the school.

Sharing their evening routine, Mrs. Esparza shared that she tried to settle the children down to do their homework while she gets busy picking up and preparing dinner. The house is large and there is ample room to run around. It takes the kids some time to settle, as they are running in and out of the house and into the back yard. From her description of the spaciousness of their home, it is clear they live in an upper-class neighborhood. As Mr. Esparza walks in from work, the kids run up to greet him and finally get down to do their homework. Theirs is a structured home where the children's time is accounted for most of the time.

Mr. and Mrs. Esparza attended public schools and were concerned about society and morality believing that the world is not like it used to be. Mr. Esparza says, "Society is changing. The morals and values are outside of the environment that we can control. It seems like everyone is lost; however, we're on the same page of what we expect and want from our kids." He continues, "We're both therapists, and so we've been in and out of seeing the public schools. Our friends send their children to public school. It was very scary for us to know that there is one extreme to the other." Mr. and Mrs. Esparza were very happy to have their daughter in a Catholic school. Both being therapist's Catholic schools came to represent places that where morals and values could be taught and a place where the daughter would be shielded from some of the ills of society.

Heritage

Mr. and Mrs. Esparza's parents were born in the United States, of parents born in Mexico. Mrs. Esparza's father was a pharmacist and her mother a nurse. Mr. Esparza's father attended a few years of college and mostly worked as a truck driver and in the oil fields. Mr.

Esparza's mother worked for the local school district assisting children of parents who were migrant workers, who left school in October and returned in April. When Mr. and Mrs. Esparza married, and left their parental home, their parents gave them some *consejos* (advice). "Never live above your means," was something Mrs. Esparza's father said to her, and her mother told her, "God is the center of everything. If you don't have Him, [you] don't have anything." Mr. Esparza lives by his father's adage "Do 'good' by your family." They have tried to live by these *consejos*.

In describing their faith, Mr. Esparza came from Catholic parents, who both attended Catholic schools. He did not attend Catholic schools because by the time he was of school age, the Catholic school in town was closed. He credits his faith development to his grandma who "had me learn prayers without a Catholic school. She was my babysitter. I was raised by her. She taught me everything and anything about my faith." As for Mrs. Esparza, he also credits her faith to her paternal grandmother, who although being Pentecostal, pushed Mrs. Esparza father to continue in the Catholic Church. About her grandmother, she said, "Education was very important to my grandmother, even though she wasn't Catholic. She was very spiritual and religious. She was Pentecostal. It stemmed from there." She continued, "She taught my dad, you're going to move forward and you're going to keep going, and you need to continue with your faith and education. Don't look back; don't worry about [anything]."

Although Mr. and Mrs. Esparza are Mexican American and share in the traditions associated with the Mexican culture but, being Hispanic was never overt or something they necessarily thought about when they were growing up. Mr. Esparza grew up in a Mexican American home with extended family around; a place his parents did not leave in their entire life. Mrs. Esparza grew up in a Mexican American family with professional parents; father a

pharmacist and mother a nurse. The expectation was that she would attend college and become successful. As parents of two young children, it was something they was not consequential to their upbringing. They aspire to raise their children in terms of faith, an education, and the opportunities they will embrace, as their parents did for them.

The Journey to Choose a Catholic School

Mr. and Mrs. Esparza were married in Mrs. Esparza's hometown and moved south of the diocese. Since Mr. Esparza was married before, they were married by the justice of the peace. Soon after being married, they settled in was a small town, perhaps 50,000 populations. When their first daughter was born, they placed her in an Episcopal daycare and Mrs. Esparza noticed the difference from that daycare to others. The Episcopal daycare was more organized and structures and they taught the children prayers and about their faith. They seemed content with their early married years. They had purchased a home and were focused on raising their daughter. Soon enough they were placed able to move due to a loss of employment. Their move to the diocese was tumultuous; Mr. and Mrs. Esparza embraced a new city, new jobs, a new home, and daughter to raise; and another along the way. This is how they described their introduction to the city. At present, their two daughters are enrolled in Holy Rosary Catholic School.

Three years after Mr. and Mrs. Esparza moved to the diocese, they began to consider where they would enroll their older daughter in kindergarten. As they drove around the city from work to home, they had often passed by St. Matthew's Catholic School and St. Luke's Catholic School and thought those schools would be ones to consider when their children became of school age. After having sold their previous home, they began to contemplate purchasing a home in the diocese. They chose to buy one on the north side of town because the

reputation of the public-school district was superior. They felt very comfortable settling into their new home and knowing that their lives and their children were in a good place.

As they continued to focus which school their daughter would attend, they noticed what seemed to be a place with portable buildings but did not know for sure if it was a school and what kind of school, at that. Mr. Esparza turned and said, “There’s this school here, what is that?” She responded, “Oh, it’s a Catholic school.” Mr. Esparza did not say much after that, as he was thinking about how much the school would cost. At the same time, there were those two other Catholic schools they could consider. In the final analysis, St. Luke’s had become too far to drive, and St. Matthews seemed too big and intimidating, plus the distance would not allow them to drop off the children and get to work.

They continued to talk and became curious about the little school just around the corner from where they lived. Their curiosity led to the consideration of Holy Rosary for their children. Mr. Esparza did not know much about Catholic school opportunities; he wondered about the academics and religion. Mrs. Esparza had more experience with religious schools; Alice had attended an Episcopal daycare, and she liked Friday chapel service and how the children were just so happy.

Their journey then began. Without anyone to talk to about the little school and without seeking any information from the Internet, they made an appointment to visit. They went to meet with the school personnel and met the vice principal; she solidified their thought that the school could be a good place. They went for their first tour of the school and saw the children in school and the flow of the day. They were impressed and shared they could sense the presence of God there. They left there, believing that it was right for the family and for them. That was

when Mrs. Esparza told her husband, “We should go ahead and enroll Mary, also.” Mary was their second daughter. Mrs. Esparza soon asked for another application.

Mr. Esparza summarized, “After that, there was really never a question or a doubt or anything. We had our experience in a private school setting and with religion incorporated. I was very okay with it.”

Mrs. Esparza became the person in charge of the registration process, although Mr. Esparza wondered whether both would be admitted. He had some questions about the school because he was not experienced Catholic schools. He knew that at some point his parents had attended Catholic school for a little bit. Had she told him from the beginning the students were going to be learning a whole year ahead, he would have been right on board with that. His older daughter was a little rambunctious. He was worried about her personality getting her in trouble. He thought, “Man, they’re going to kick her out.” His thought went back to the stories her mother would tell describing the nuns and their strict countenance.

Mrs. Esparza had the children tested and evaluated, as part of the registration process. They waited for what seemed an eternity. One day, after going to the mailbox to see if they had received a notice from the school, they saw an envelope, opened it, and a lot of confetti landed on their floor. Mr. Esparza felt the receipt of the envelope to be as gratifying and satisfying as his acceptance letter into college. It was a letter welcoming them into Holy Rosary Catholic School.

Everything was exciting at that point; this they wanted me to understand. They were newly married, in a sense. They were new to parenting with children, new to a city they had never even thought about living in and new to their jobs. A lot was new, and they finally feeling

settled. The first couple of years had been an emotional roller coaster. Then everything started falling into place easily. They found work and then a home, and then the girls' school.

Having visited with the vice principal who spoke from the heart, made an impact and a difference in making the decision about enrolling their children at Holy Rosary. It was about how much the vice principal enjoyed her job and position with the school. "She sat down, the door was shut, and she talked about how great an impact, the school had made in her and her kid's lives." They shared a couple of tears together. That was what made the crucial difference.

In summary, although Mrs. Esparza was charged with the registration process, both Mr. and Mrs. Esparza seemed equally responsible for the selection. Mr. and Mrs. Esparza did not avail themselves of this process or information about Holy Rosary. When asked why they selected Holy Rosary School, they simply said that the school was the first they thought of, it was around their home and they thought they would take a look. There were no negotiations to speak of. Both parents agreed. The visit to the school and meeting with the vice principal was the most crucial aspect of the school selection process they followed.

Summary

This chapter consisted of the results of data collection and featured six vignettes describing the background of the participants, their heritage and their journey towards finding Catholic schools for their children. These results focused on answering the research questions of: who chooses; the gathering and use of information; negotiated actions and the aggregation mechanism used by parents. In the next chapter, I will discuss and elaborate on the themes that emerged as I explored each vignette and the journey of each couple as the selected Catholic schools for their children. I will also place these findings within the appropriate frameworks of literature and will identify those results adding to the body of literature.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and analyze the process used by Mexican American parents in selecting Catholic schools for their children, in a diocese located in the southern region of the United States. The conclusions of this study are structured around the research questions and address four constructs involved in the process of school selection: who chooses; the gathering and use of information; negotiated actions and the aggregation mechanism. The theoretical framework of this study was based on the rational choice model of Freidman and Hechter (1988) and literature on school selection. Six Mexican American couples were selected who met the following criteria: married, Catholic, and have their first-born in a Catholic prekindergarten or kindergarten. Of the six couples, three were also selected based on having received financial assistance. Each couple was purposively selected based on the recommendations of Catholic school administrators and were each considered separate cases and reported as such. Vignettes of each couple were also provided so as assist in understanding more in depth, the process each used to select Catholic schools for their children.

The overarching question of the study was: What is the process Mexican American parents use to select Catholic schools for their children? The study also examined four subtopics: (a) *Who chooses*: Who is involved in the process Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools? (b) *Gathering and use of information*: What sources and types of information do Mexican American parents gather and use in the process of selecting Catholic schools? (c) *Negotiated Actions* - What are the various points of negotiation Mexican American parents

consider in selecting Catholic Schools? (d) *The Aggregation Mechanism* - What aggregation mechanism constructs do Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools?

The data obtained from interviews were structured using a categorization matrix and coded deductively, as per the protocols established by content analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The data were also examined inductively for within case and cross-case analysis using a modified constant comparison methodology, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Following is a discussion of the major findings, themes and implications, a final reflection follows. This chapter is organized in the following manner: an overview of the process Mexican American parents use to select Catholic schools; research questions and a discussion of the findings; major themes; summary; implications for practice and policy development; recommendations for future research; researcher reflections; and conclusion.

Responding to the Overarching Question

The purpose of this study was to describe the process used by Mexican American parents who had selected Catholic schools for their children. The process used by Mexican American parents, in the selection of Catholic schools for their children was much more informal and less traditional than the process of school selection outlined by Friedman and Hechter (1988).

Mexican American parents often spoke of their desire to send their children to Catholic schools prior to being married and prior to the birth of their children. This is a critical finding as it clearly predisposed mothers, who directed the school selection process, to structure the process to include providing fathers information about the virtues of Catholic schools thus convincing them to enroll their children in Catholic schools. Mothers were found to direct the school selection process, fathers played the role of confirmers and grandmothers were also involved.

Mexican American parents most often lacked a hierarchy of preferences as prescribed in the literature but most often included general educational aims; especially seeking Catholic schools where their children could be happy. This finding did not circumvent finding schools that provided good academic and curricular programs, but was significant enough to cause parents to change schools if there would come a time when their children were not happy.

Mexican American parents also, considered schools proximate to their homes and considered the logistics of dropping-off and picking up the children on the way to and from work. Before seeking information about schools—whether through the Internet, cold knowledge from schools, or hot knowledge from friends and family—they proceeded to choose a single Catholic school for their children instead of choosing two or three. Mexican American parents also identified the school as the most significant source of information they received; most often during their visit to the school. Participants made use of the Internet only slightly and used friends and family as a means of gathering hot knowledge only minimally. On the selection of a single school, parents made the single choice, to a large degree, based on the school's proximity to their homes and the logistics of their work schedules, assuring them that they could drop off and pick up their children as part of their daily routines.

As part of negotiated actions of the process, parents discussed the pros and cons of choosing Catholic schools and most often discussed their inability to afford tuition as a reason not to select Catholic schools. In all these cases, after a review of their family finances, parents agreed to sacrifice and go without to send their children to Catholic schools.

In terms of the aggregation mechanism and the most important constructs leading to a Catholic school selection, Mexican American parents identified the most significant source of

information as being received during their visit to the school. The participants also identified their visit with the principal as the most critical part of the school selection process.

Mexican American participants clearly valued Catholic education. However, they measured this value in different ways. Some sought a Catholic education as a means of not enrolling their children in public school, which was perceived to have excessively high student–teacher ratios. Public schools were also perceived as having stopped teaching morality and virtues. Some had convictions that Catholic schools were appropriate choices because they had attended a Catholic school themselves; in four of the six cases, the mother and/or the father had attended Catholic schools as youngsters. The Catholic school was also chosen because it was known to be the best conveyor of the faith. For many parents, this was their primary reason for selecting a Catholic school. However, equal to that reason was that their children would also receive a solid academic education and that their children be happy. Most parents saw Catholic education as an investment in the future of their children.

It could be suggested that the process Mexican American parents used in selecting Catholic schools was a manifestation of Mexican American culture, though none of the participants would admit to such a portrayal when providing reasons for the process. Most participating couples identified themselves as second or third generation, with second generation meaning that their parents were first-generation immigrants from Mexico and third generation meaning that their grandparents were first-generation immigrants from Mexico. Although these couples' economic and educational standing were above the median economic and educational standing of many of their Mexican American counterparts, their process of school selection was certainly different from the general process identified in the literature. In Mexican American psychology and culture, there is a phenomenon that describes Mexicans as more family focused,

their work to be a labor of love versus a means of achievement, that they resolve problems by adjusting to the environment versus changing the environment in which they find themselves, and, most important, that they seek to remove any stress in their lives by taking the quickest route towards a solution (Diaz-Guerrero, 1975). This may well explain the informal process of school selection, which sees education as mother's work, seeks and makes use of little information, and makes a single school selection. Additionally, the literature revealed that parents who have limited resources often restrict their selection to a single school. The literature reveals that immigrants do not avail themselves of much information when making school selections (Louie and Holdaway (2009).

This study represents the thoughts and processes identified by Mexican American participants in their journey of selecting Catholic schools for their children. All the participants valued the choice of Catholic schools and seemed convinced that their choice was in the best interest of their children and family. These Mexican American children will benefit from the structure, faith component, and academic excellence provided by Catholic schools. Continuing in Catholic schools will provide them the opportunity to graduate with skills and knowledge equal to their White counterparts, and their prospects for university and beyond, as discussed by Dolan (2010), will be brighter.

Research Questions and a Discussion of the Findings

The discussion below is premised on the Freidman and Hechter (1988) rational choice model, the research questions and the literature on school selection. Using this as basic framework guiding this study, I discuss the findings described in the various vignettes found in the previous chapter.

Research Question #1: *Who Chooses*: Who is Involved in the Process Mexican American Parents Use in Selecting Catholic Schools?

The construct of who chooses was established to understand the dynamic of who in the Mexican American family was involved in the process of school selection, who directed the process, and who made the final decision. The study found that mothers most often directed the school selection process and involved fathers as confirmers by sharing information about the school(s) with them, visiting the school(s) with them, and convincing them of the virtues of Catholic schools. These findings are consistent with the literature on the role of mothers and fathers in the process of school selection. Additionally, although grandmothers were involved in influencing the school selection process in only two cases, their involvement is an important finding in that the extended family plays an important role in the lives of Mexican Americans. Due to the matriarchal nature of Mexican American families, grandmothers play even more important role as major stakeholders in the lives of Mexican American families.

The major finding that mothers direct the process of school selection is consistent with the literature on school selection, which has described mothers as being responsible for the school selection process (David et al., 1994). Consistent with mothers' being responsible for the education of their children, Reay and Ball (2001) suggested the notion of *mother's work*, with mothers being responsible for the gathering of information about schools and taking charge of the children's schooling. Among the participants in this study, there was a veiled notion that the construct of "mother's work" might also be present. However, when addressed directly, only one couple would admit to such an explanation. Additionally, when both parents were involved in the decision, mothers played a constructive role, and fathers played a confirming role, consistent with the research of Reay (1998) and Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001).

For the issue of grandmothers being involved in the process of school selection, in one case, the maternal grandmother was invited to be an integral part of the selection process, which included seeking information, visiting schools, and sharing her opinion about which school her grandchild should attend. In another case, the paternal grandmother inserted herself into the decision process by insisting that her grandson(s) be enrolled in a Catholic school. She demanded that her grandson(s) attend a Catholic school, and she directed the process by pressuring her son and daughter-in-law to enroll the children in a Catholic school even though they were against the action and did not believe they could afford the school. Although grandmothers did not play a role in the selection of a school in all cases, grandmothers were an important part of the process for some and are considered an important cultural component in Mexican American families where grandmothers are present. The concept of the matriarchal figure is ever present in the Mexican American family lexicon (Delatorre, 2009). Additionally, when speaking with participants about the roles of their grandparents, most identified grandparents as being important in their own faith development. Although most parents were identified as being responsible for their children's participation in "church," it was the grandparents who played the role of being influential for faith formation, as they taught their grandchildren their prayers, cultural faith traditions, and a belief in God. The role of grandparents in Mexican American families should not be understated.

As for the involvement of fathers in the process of school selection, in five of six cases, fathers expressed the desire to be involved in the process and were involved in the process. This finding is consistent with Brooks (2004), Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001), and Reay (1998), who conducted research on the roles of fathers and mothers, which suggested that mothers were most often involved in directing the process but that fathers were also able and willing to play

important roles. In two of the cases, each father agreed that the choice of Catholic schools was an appropriate one. However, in three other cases, the fathers had to be convinced. Because the mothers directed the process of school selection, they were in better positions to bring data to their husbands that would positively impact their decisions; they did so in this study.

As an outlier in this study, in one case, the father did not agree to enroll his children in Catholic schools and was not involved in the school selection process even though the mother went ahead and enrolled the children in Catholic schools. His desire for his children to attend public schools did not have much to do with the Catholic schools but rather with money and with his desire to place school tuition costs into a savings account that would cover future college costs. His transition from public schools to a successful career underscored his desire. With many of the participants in the study sacrificing to send their children to Catholic schools, the argument of not sending the children to such schools to save for college was an awkward juxtaposition, especially because this participant couple could easily afford both. After his children, had been enrolled in Catholic schools for more than five years, he became convinced that his wife's choice of the Catholic schools was the correct one.

In summary, Mexican American mothers directed the school selection process, and they involved their husbands (fathers) by sharing information about the school(s) with them, visiting the school(s) with them, and convincing them of the virtues of Catholic schools. The fathers were often confirmers of the decision to enroll the children in Catholic schools. Grandmothers were also influential in the school selection process, and this later finding is important in understanding the concept of the expanded family in Mexican American culture and its influence in the school selection process.

Research Question #2: *Gathering and Use of Information:* What Sources and Types of Information do Mexican American Parents Gather and Use in the Process of Selecting Catholic Schools?

The construct of gathering and using information as a part of the school selection process was described in the literature as being the most critical step in the process of school selection (David et al., 1994; Gewirtz et al., 1995). This study found that Mexican American parents used minimal information (hot or cold knowledge) before selecting Catholic schools for their children and relied on the schools as the major sources of information. This finding contrasts the body of literature that identified the gathering of information in the form of cold and hot knowledge, as the most critical aspect of the school selection process. In this study, the gathering and use of information was less critical than in the body of literature. Participants each sought minimal information from friends and family or from the Internet, preselected only one school to consider, and waited to visit the school to receive information from the school directly. Participants identified the visit with the principal as the most crucial aspect of the process of school selection.

In four of six cases, the participants availed themselves of minimal information before selecting the Catholic schools they would visit. These participants also used the Internet, though only minimally, and only in one case was the Internet fully used to gather information about various schools. In two of six cases, participants made no use of the Internet. Additionally, in three of the four cases, the participants who consulted the Internet did so only after they had made the choices of which schools they would consider. The Internet was used primarily to seek information about tuition and programs. Although this finding of parents' availing themselves of information minimally is not consistent with most of the literature on school

selection (Bell, 2009; Friedman & Hechter, 1988; Galotti, 2002; Joshi, 2014), it is parenthetically consistent with the research of Louie and Holdaway (2009), who found that immigrants and their progeny used little sought information in making informed decisions about the schools their children would attend. The Louie and Holdaway (2009) study reflected the premise that immigrant families were poor, lacked social networks, and would simply select the neighborhood schools. In five of six cases of this study, the participants were college educated, and although some participants struggled to pay tuition, none was generally considered poor or immigrant but rather middle or upper class economically and at least second generation. The notion of availing themselves of minimal information may have had more to do with mothers' being convinced that their children would attend Catholic schools, those that were near their homes and ones that were convenient considering their to-and-from-work logistics of drop-off and pickup. Their failure to seek much information also seems to parallel the behaviors of first-generation families—ones that lacked the social networks necessary to contemplate a wider array of choices.

Additionally, important in this discussion is that in five of six cases, each participant preselected only one Catholic school rather than two or three. In three of six cases, parents selected the schools based on the schools' proximity to their homes and based on being able to drop off and pick up their children because the schools were on the way to and from work. In another case, the school was selected because the mother began to search for employment in a Catholic school where her daughter could be happy and receive a better academic education than she did in the previous school, and the family was to receive a half-tuition discount. In yet another case, the grandmother made the decision about which school her grandson(s) would attend. In the final outlier case, the participants sought information about various schools, from the Internet, selected three schools to visit, and made their decision after being provided

information about the schools during their visits. The fact that the participants made a single school selection before gathering much information gives significance to this finding and adds to the body of literature. Moreover, in four of six cases, the participants indicated that the information they received during their visits to schools was a critical factor in the school selection process. In fact, the visits with the principals convinced the participants that the schools they chose to visit were the correct choices. These two findings add to the body of literature on school selection.

In summary, Mexican American participants made use of minimal information before selecting Catholic schools to visit, and only after making their choices did they receive almost all the information from the schools themselves.

Research Question # 3: *Negotiated Actions*: What Are the Various Points of Negotiation Mexican American Parents Use in Selecting Catholic Schools?

When considering points of negotiations, the participants of this study preferred to use the word *conversations* rather than *negotiations*. There seemed to be two aims that Mexican American parents weighed in their decision to choose or even consider a Catholic school. One aim was to find Catholic schools where their children would be happy. Another aim was to find Catholic schools close to their homes and ones where they could drop off and pick up their children on the way to and from work. These aims, one psychosocial and one practical, influenced the selection of schools for these parents. Regarding their motivation for choosing Catholic schools versus other schools, many of the participants, before they were married, spoke of their desire to have their children attend Catholic schools. A predisposition toward Catholic schools served as a key motivator in the selection of Catholic schools for their children. For those fathers who were not yet convinced about Catholic schools, the mothers convinced them of

the virtues of Catholic schools. Additionally, in four of six cases, the mother or father had attended Catholic elementary and high school; this certainly predisposed some to enroll their children in Catholic schools. While engaging in conversations, the participants sought little information from the Internet or from their family and friends before making the choice of visiting only one Catholic school. It was after they had made their choices of which schools to visit that they then sought some information about tuition and programs from the Internet. Most of the information they gathered came from the schools themselves during their visits to the schools. This school information was gathered to better understand what the schools had to offer and was not significant as part of any of the negotiation that took place. What became significant were their visits with the school principals. The participants identified the visits with the principals as the most crucial aspect in their decision to select the Catholic schools they visited.

When the participants were asked about negotiated actions, in almost all cases, they used the word “conversations” and not “negotiations” to describe the debates or compromises taking place. They seemed to imply that the word *negotiation* would result in one of them winning and one of them losing. Instead, parents used the word *conversations* to talk about the consultations that took place. This is significant in that it points to the interaction between Mexican American parents and the school, and it postures the relationship as needing to be conversational versus confrontational.

In seeking Catholic schools for their children, the participants all agreed that their children’s happiness was an important aim to consider. The sense of a pleasant feel, a pleasant structure, and mutual respect between the school and home and between the student and teacher was fundamental in the participants’ choices of schools. This finding is consistent with the

literature on pleasant feel and Coldron (2014), who viewed parents' concern about their children being with friends; being in a safe and disciplined environment; having caring teachers; and being close to home as criteria that are important to parents seeking their children's happiness.

Regarding the motivation of participants to choose Catholic schools for their children, there are two points to consider: In three of four cases, mothers spoke with their husbands about their desire to have their future children in Catholic schools, and in four of six cases, one of the couple participants attended Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Those participants had a predisposition toward Catholic schools; also, not all husbands were convinced. Because mothers directed the school selection process, they successfully convinced their husbands of the virtues of Catholic schools. This is consistent with the research of Reay and Ball (2009), in which mothers considered themselves experts and structured the information they would give to their husbands, to reach their intended results.

In terms of grandmothers being involved in the process of school selection, two grandmothers played pivotal roles. In one case, a grandmother directed the process of school selection, and in the other, the grandmother was critically involved in every aspect of the selection process—this by invitation. The extended family and grandmothers, among Mexican American families, often play very important roles in family life. In these two cases, they were pivotal in helping their children to reach the important decision of which Catholic schools they should select.

In terms of other conversations in which participants engaged that impacted their decision to send their children to Catholic schools, there were conversations about the scarcity of resources and being able to afford Catholic school tuition. Many of the families in this study had incomes between \$75,000 and \$100,000. Affording tuition for them was a question of

priorities and of making sacrifices, which they were willing to make. For the broader Mexican American population, does there come a point when Catholic school tuition costs become prohibitive for a family based on the family's income? Important to the question of cost is the question of a family's willingness to sacrifice to send their children to Catholic schools.

In considering schools, many participants sought schools that were near their homes: neighborhood schools. Parents seemed to select schools based on their proximity and not due to whether they had better academics or other valuable offerings compared to other Catholic schools. Although it is true that the participants in this study wanted schools with high academic programs and extracurricular programs, they did not seek to compare schools to determine which ones were better than the others. This may have been done to facilitate the negotiation of a single school. To the larger point, Mexican Americans, in their personal conversations, often seek the quickest paths toward compromise and agreement. In fact, Mexico's Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance index is 82, the highest of all Latin American countries, as opposed to 46 in the United States, indicating Mexican Americans' low level of tolerance for uncertainty (Schuler, Jackson, Jackofsky, & Slocum 1996).

Additionally, the research of Bell (2009) speaks to the issue of bounded rationalities, where parents bind their choice sets of schools based on factors such as income, information, transportation, and their social networks. Social capital becomes important for many parents as part of seeking out information. Social capital is "the material and immaterial resources that individuals and families are able to access through their socialites" (Horvat et al., 2003, p. 323). The lack of social capital in the six cases under study contributed to parents' each making a single school selection. In one-third of the cases that Bell (2009) described, the participants conducted closed searches, meaning that parents chose to limit their choices of schools to only

one school in each case. In that same study, Bell (2009) also spoke about the concept of “customary enrollment patterns” to suggest that parents limit school selection, especially in private schools, to what may be customary in the expectation that neighborhood schools exist or that feeder patterns sometimes dictate school selection (p. 198). Parents also believed that the single schools they chose offered programs with good reputations, consistent with the participants of this study. These explanations provide some insight for parents’ restricting their school selection to only one.

In summary, the conversations that took place within couples were not about differentiating between schools but rather seeking neighborhood schools, discussing whether they could work through the logistics of work and school, dealing with the scarcity of resources, and convincing husbands of the virtues of Catholic schools. Additionally, the fact that the mothers in three of six cases had discussed with their husbands their desire for their future children to attend Catholic schools made it more likely than not that they would select Catholic schools for their children. Four of six cases in which at least one parent had attended Catholic schools in each case also provided the participants with some predisposition toward selecting Catholic schools for their children. It was clear from speaking with Mexican American participants of this study that mothers had the presence of mind to discuss, before they were married, that they wanted their children to attend Catholic schools when their future children would reach school age. Because no literature was found on this specific topic, allow me to contextualize this finding; in two of three cases, the participant mothers went to Catholic schools, which provided sufficient affinity with Catholic schools; this was important in their desire to enroll their children in Catholic schools. In the other case, a participant mom’s father attended Catholic schools, and she shared that because her father had become successful and such a good

man, she wanted her children to attend Catholic schools. These mothers felt so inclined to want their children in Catholic schools that they made sure to discuss this sentiment before they were married. Lastly, many of the participants called any “negotiations” that took place “conversations,” and most of these conversations focused on the affordability of tuition and on convincing the father about the virtues of Catholic schools. The conversations about affordability dealt with whether they could afford to pay the cost considering their budgets and income constraints, not to justify the costs.

Research Question #4: *The Aggregation Mechanism* - What Aggregation Mechanism Constructs do Mexican American Parents Use in Selecting Catholic Schools?

A review of the aggregation mechanism involves examining the various constructs of who chooses, the gathering and use of information, and negotiated actions, as previously discussed. In general, the aggregation mechanism explains that parents, at the start of the process, establish aims for their children, and based on these aims, they begin to consider schools. This causes parents to preselect two or three schools and to gather information about each. The information sources could include the Internet, a visit to the school, a phone call, or information from friends and family. This more often follows visits to various schools. After having visited and gathered more information, parents often expand or constrict their choices of schools and enter negotiations about the various schools, leading to the selection of schools for their children (Friedman & Hechter, 1988).

When discussing what was most important in the process of school selection, there were various crucial constructs that participants identified: Mothers directed the process with fathers confirming and grandmothers also being involved; participants having a predisposition toward Catholic schools as evidenced by discussions before they were married as to their desire to have

future children in Catholic schools and some having attended Catholic schools; participants were seeking schools where their children could be happy, schools that were structured to include being with friends; safe and disciplined environments; caring teachers; proximity to home, a criterion important to parents seeking their children's happiness; participants' making the choice of visiting only one school, without gathering much information about the school and basing the decision on the school's proximity to the home and on their being able to work through the logistics of work and the children's drop-off and pickup to and from work; and their visits to the schools, their receipt of school information, and their visits with the school principals.

In terms of what motivated participants to consider Catholic schools, the participants had a predisposition toward Catholic schools as evidenced by discussions before they were married as to their desire to have future children in Catholic schools and their having attended Catholic schools. In the cases of those who had spoken about Catholic schools before being married, some husbands were not totally convinced that the Catholic school was a good choice. Some of the misgivings centered on whether the couple could afford tuition. Because mothers most often directed the school selection process, they brought information about the virtues of a Catholic school and convinced the husbands that it would be a good choice. Secondly, because four of six participants had attended Catholic schools when young, the notion of their children attending Catholic schools was not foreign to them. All participants wanted to select schools with good academic programs, extracurricular activities, and places where their children could be happy.

Participants were seeking schools where their children could be happy, schools that were structured to include being with friends; safe and disciplined environments; schools with caring teachers; and schools close to home, as criteria important to parents seeking their children's happiness (Coldron, 2014). In seeking Catholic schools, children's happiness became the

overwhelming criteria for parents. Although they sought minimal information when selecting the Catholic schools to visit, it was the visits to the schools, the tours, seeing the children at work, and playing and speaking with the teachers and principals that convinced the participants that the environments were “warm and fuzzy.”

Participants often selected their neighborhood Catholic schools. Making the choice of visiting only one school, without gathering much information about the school and basing the decision on the school’s proximity to home and being able to work through the logistics of work and the children’s drop-off and pickup to and from work, was an important construct in the school selection process. Although participants could have selected various schools to consider, the overwhelming criteria for their selection was that the school was close to home and that their work logistics would allow for them to drop off and pick up their children to and from work. This does not underserve the notion of finding a school where their children could be happy, nor does it negate the fact that the participants would still need to visit schools to confirm their criteria. In each case, the visit to the school confirmed the participant’s choice. Participants gathered minimal information about the schools they were to visit, before they made their selections and confirmed their lack of social networks. Had they had larger social networks, I am convinced they would have sought additional information. On the other hand, the choices that participants made about which schools to visit must have been choices they had thought about long before moving to certain sides of town and purchasing homes in certain neighborhoods and, at times, close to parents. This may have helped in predetermining which Catholic schools the children would attend. All the participants indicated a lack of social network, even those in the upper economic strata. The receipt of cold or hot knowledge

information was not even something participants understood, especially in relation to grapevine knowledge.

The visit to the school, the receipt of information from the school, and the visit with the school principal constituted the most important constructs in the school selection decision. Participants almost exclusively received most of their information about the schools directly from the school principals. Having gathered information from the schools was identified as very important, but the information did not seem to be as critical as the visits around the schools and speaking with the principals. Mexican American parents needed to acquaint themselves with the schools and their surroundings, seeing their children interact with the surroundings and seeing how teachers interacted with their students. This was more important than any hot or cold knowledge received from the school. In fact, many participants indicated that they discounted much of the information they received from the schools, outside of the information they gleaned from the walk-throughs and visits with the principals. The conversations with the principals, as the highest authority figures in the schools, also gave parents confidence that their children would be well taken care of and that, if not, they would have access to the principals to seek recourse. This finding adds to the body of literature and places the gathering of information as secondary to visiting with the school and speaking with the school principal. This finding is, in fact, not consistent with the literature placing the gathering and use of information as the most crucial aspect of school selection (David et al., 1994; Gewirtz et al., 1995). These findings raise important questions about whether this process was a culturally induced process in that parents, in this study, overwhelmingly identified the visit with the principal as the most crucial aspect of the school selection process.

In general, the basic structure of the aggregation mechanism that Friedman and Hechter (1988) developed was used only parenthetically, as the details of each construct varied from the framework. The participants each sought Catholic schools where their children could be happy, availed themselves of minimal information, made a single choice about which schools they would consider, engaged in little negotiation, and of the negotiations they had, they reclassified them as conversations. The main conversations they did have were about the scarcity of resources (inability to afford tuition), convincing fathers of the virtues of Catholic schools, and remembering that before they were married, in three of six cases, mothers informed fathers of their desire that the children would attend Catholic schools. Additionally, they selected schools close to their homes and ones where their work logistics allowed for smooth drop-off and pick-up protocols. Any negotiations that took place were resolved among the husbands, wives, and grandmothers. They did not deal with likenesses or differences between schools. Negotiations with family members involved issues resolved within the family dynamic. The aggregation mechanism that Mexican American parents used did not fully follow the Hechter and Friedman (1988) model of school selection but instead followed a more informal and less traditional protocol.

In summary, the aggregation mechanism that Mexican American parents used in the process of selecting Catholic schools was derived from the constructs of: who chooses; the gathering and use of information; and negotiated actions. It depicts the various constructs found in the Friedman and Hechter (1988) model of school selection and identifies the framework of Mexican American school selection differently.

Major Themes

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and analyze the process Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools for their children. The process underscored in the previous section included the constructs of: who chooses; the gathering and use of information; negotiated actions; and the aggregation mechanism per the Freidman and Hechter (1988) rational choice model. It also described in full detail how parents engaged such constructs. However, the process of selecting a school is just that, a process. It can be outlined and well understood and provide others with a basic understanding of how Mexican American parents go about selecting Catholic schools for their children. What cannot be fully understood, are the nuances involved when parents enter the personal process of selecting schools. Below are three themes that emerged from the data that are significant in understanding the purpose of this study. These themes include: Mexican American parents seek children's happiness, among other criteria; Mexican American parents are predisposed to Catholic schools as mothers direct the process, fathers play a confirming role and grandmothers are also involved; and parents consider visit with school principal crucial, among other criteria.

Mexican American Parents Seek Children's Happiness, among Other Criteria

In seeking out Catholic schools, Mexican American parents establish various influences as criteria for choosing Catholic schools. These include: seeking their children's happiness; seeking schools close to their homes; seeking schools where their work logistics parallel drop-off and pick up to and from work; and selecting only one school to consider.

When considering the reasons, parents select schools for their children, the literature on school selection is replete with examples of the importance of the construct of children happiness (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Coldron, 1991). All participants in the study identified happiness as a

major goal in the process of selecting Catholic schools for their children. Beyond the structures of the Catholic schools, their curricula, and how their environments felt, parents wanted to assure themselves that the schools would be places where their children would be happy. In one case, the mother moved her children from three different schools because the children were not happy. Some participants used the phrase *warm and fuzzy* to identify what they were looking for in a school. The concept of children's happiness and schools includes a broader concept including schools that were structured to include being with friends; safe and disciplined environments; caring teachers; and proximity to home as criteria important to parents seeking their children's happiness. Many of the parents in the study not only sought schools where their children could be happy but also spoke about highly structured and disciplined environments in the schools and their desire for their children to have many friends.

Involved in seeking places of happiness for their children was also the concept of selecting Catholic schools that were near their homes and those where their daily work logistics paralleled their ability to drop off and pick up their children on the way to and from work. Happiness for their children also extended to their ability to make things work on a day-to-day basis. Many Mexican American families would probably not seek Catholic schools if they were not able to work through their work logistics.

Mexican American Parents Are Predisposed to Catholic Schools as Mothers Direct the Process, Fathers Play a Confirming Role and Grandmothers are Also Involved.

In examining Mexican American parents' desire to enroll their children in Catholic schools, they were predisposed to sending their children to Catholic schools based on two phenomena: having attended Catholic schools themselves and having discussed, before being married, a desire for their children to attend Catholic schools. These predispositions have a

bearing on their decision to enroll their children in Catholic schools. In four of six cases, at least one participant attended Catholic schools, and in three of six cases, the participants had spoken about enrolling their children in Catholic schools prior to getting married. Additionally, mothers directed the process of school selection with fathers playing a confirming role and grandmothers also involved.

The roles of mothers, fathers, and grandmothers became apparent as participants described who in the family was involved in the process of school selection. The participants of this study comprised six Catholic couples who had children enrolled in prekindergarten or kindergarten in Catholic schools. In each of five of the six cases, both the mother and father participated in the process of selecting a Catholic school for their son or daughter. In detailing the participation of each parent, it became clear that both parents were fully engaged in the process but that mothers played the critical role of directing the process, while fathers played confirming roles. In two of six cases, grandmothers also played pivotal roles in the process. This finding was consistent with the literature and with the research of Brooks (2004), David et al. (1994), Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001), and Reay (1998) in relation to mothers' and fathers' playing pivotal roles, and it was consistent with the research of De La Torre (2009) on the extended family and the importance of the matriarchal structure in Mexican American families.

Additionally, although not a part of the Friedman and Hechter (1988) model of school selection, the participants of the study indicated that their grandparents were very much a part of the faith development. In four of six cases, the participants indicated that their grandparents were a major source of their own faith development. Parents were also found to be significant in the lives of their children, as they engaged the participants to attend Mass and, in some cases,

to attend Catholic schools. However, the participants indicated that grandparents were the ones who taught them about their faith and about different prayers. The grandparents loved them dearly and became their faith grounding as adults.

In five of the six cases, the mothers were ones who took charge and directed the school selection process. They did this by bringing information to their husbands, choosing to work in Catholic schools, deciding to enroll their children in Catholic schools in direct opposition to their husbands, inviting the children's grandmothers to be a part of the process, or convincing their husbands of the virtues of Catholic schools. Mothers always placed themselves able to be able to influence the process of school selection and to select the Catholic schools for their children. In fact, in three of six cases, their expressed desire to have their future children attend Catholic schools was a critical aspect of the children's eventual enrollment in Catholic schools.

Having spoken to their husbands about their children attending Catholic schools even before they were married and at least four of six couple having the husband or wife attend Catholic schools provided some predisposition for these couples to strongly consider Catholic schools for their children.

Although there were some cases in which fathers did not fully embrace the notion of sending their children to Catholic schools, all participant mothers were convinced that Catholic schools would be the best choices for their children. Because mothers directed the process of school selection in five of six cases, mothers were in the best position to convince their husbands of the virtues of Catholic schools. And they did so. Additionally, despite mothers' wanting their child enrolled in Catholic schools, the scarcity of resources (being able to afford tuition) was also a rationale for fathers' not embracing more fully the notion of Catholic schools. In four of six cases, seeing that their wives desired a Catholic school education for their children, all

fathers reviewed their families' finances and agreed to sacrifice and enroll their children in Catholic school education.

Parents Consider Visit with School Principal Crucial, among Other Criteria

In examining the process of school selection, there are various constructs that parents consider to be crucial in the process of school selection, including: using little information; making a single school selection; selecting schools close to home; assuring themselves that the schools are ones in which their children could be happy; and visiting with the school principals.

Participants in this study each sought only one Catholic school in the process of school selection rather than choosing two or three schools, seeking information and then entering negotiated actions. The reason for selecting only one school and gathering minimal information had more to do with the desire to select schools close to their homes and ones in which their work logistics allowed for them to drop off and pick up their children on their way to and from work.

Additionally, the notion of their children's being happy included finding schools whose structures paralleled their structured and disciplined home environments, their having friends from the schools, and the schools' being close to their home, thus allowing for smooth daily transitions to and from school.

Considered the most crucial construct of the total school selection process was the visit with the school principal. In five of six cases, participants indicated that it was during their visits with the school principals that they made the decision to enroll their children in the Catholic schools they first selected. The visits with the principals allowed them to listen to the priorities of the school principals and gave them the notion that they would have access to the principals whenever they may need to access him/her. Additionally, visiting with the highest

school authority figures gave the participants satisfaction that the principals were making commitments about their children's education directly to them. The notion that the selection process must involve conversations rather than confrontations, as discussed earlier, was important during their visits with the principals and deciding to enroll in the Catholic schools they chose.

Summary

In detailing the process that Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools, many interesting aspects of the process come to the forefront. In a traditional Mexican American family, it is believed that the father is most often the individual making decisions for the family. The findings of this study clearly place mothers and, in some cases, the grandmothers in charge of directing critical family decisions. Perhaps this is because education is mother's work, as clearly identified in the literature. Children's happiness is a clear goal of the Mexican American family, as children are the most valuable assets that parents engender. Mexican American parents clearly understand that the future of their children comes from advancing their education—the ability to advance to the next level economically and socially. Parents, having attended Catholic schools, and mothers' being predisposed to their children to attend Catholic schools also bodes well and enable wives to convince their husbands of the virtues of Catholic schools. Lastly, and most crucial, are the visits with the school principals that Mexican American parents cite as most important; meeting with the highest authority in the school and getting commitments about what to expect from the school, provides parents an assurance that they can then seek redress, if things don't go right.

Implications for Practice and Policy Development

The purpose of this study was to describe the process that Mexican-American parents use in selecting Catholic schools for their children. The theoretical framework used in the study was developed by Freidman and Hechter (1988) and identified a protocol that parents use when selecting schools, including who chooses; the gathering and use of information; negotiated actions; and the aggregation mechanism outlining those constructs important to the process of school selection.

This research study has shown that the process Mexican-American parents use to select Catholic schools is unconventional and informal, and it seems to have as a goal the quickest resolution toward determining which Catholic schools the children will attend. The theoretical framework and other research propose a process that is systematic and includes various stages. All lead toward establishing goals for children; seeking a large variety of information from friends, family, and schools; and then developing a list of potential schools, visiting those schools, and entering a negotiation process where parents discuss the pros and cons of the schools, including the scarcity of resources and institutional constraints.

The process of Mexican-American Catholic school selection was less systematic; mothers directed the process, fathers confirmed the selections, and grandmothers were also involved. Mothers, before they were married, discussed with their future husbands their desire for their future children to attend Catholic schools; they seemed predisposed to send their future children to Catholic schools. When it came to beginning a search for Catholic schools, parents often chose Catholic schools close to their homes and ones where they could drop off and pick up their children to and from work. They were also seeking schools where their children could be happy and ones with solid academic and program opportunities. Additionally, most parents selected

their Catholic schools without considering or visiting other schools and without seeking much information. Most of the information about the schools was collected during their visits to the schools, and parents considered their visits with the school principals to be most crucial in the process of deciding they would enroll their children in the initial choices of schools they made.

These are the major findings and are important because they provide episcopal leaders, superintendents, principals, educational leaders, and Hispanic parents with data from which to explore the possibilities that this newly discovered process can provide. Mexican-American parents seek Catholic schools that are happy places, especially those Catholic schools close to their homes. Mexican-American parents are often predisposed to Catholic schools, especially mothers and grandmothers. Mexican-American parents consider a visit with the school principal to be an essential part of the decision-making process. These findings are also important in that they fill the gap in the literature detailing the process that Mexican-American parents use in selecting Catholic schools for their children.

This study is significant for several reasons. First, the study fills the existing gap in the body of literature detailing the process Mexican American parents use in selecting Catholic schools for their children. An understanding of the how Mexican American parents select Catholic schools, will enable episcopal leaders, Catholic school educators, researchers, and policy makers to develop strategies that may impact the recruitment of Hispanic and Mexican American children into Catholic schools in the United States. However, they must not stop there, as discussed in Ospino and O'Neill (2016), there needs to be a new understanding about the role of Hispanics in the mainstream of the Catholic Church; "the entire Catholic community in the United States must acknowledge that the education of the next generation of American Catholics may be in peril" (p. 10). This is the broader context of this study. Without a broader

consideration, Hispanic Catholics may have more of their children enrolled in Catholic schools but will never feel an integral part of the Catholic Church. There needs to be a way to take the richness of the Hispanic religious culture and incorporate into the American Catholic Church, to create a church that begins to feel Hispanic versus a church that continues to be foreign to many Hispanics.

Per Funk and Martinez (2014), 42% of all Catholics are Hispanic and have a relatively small number of their children enrolled in Catholic schools. Finding ways to bring Hispanic children into Catholic schools is necessary if episcopal and Catholic school leaders are to respond to their educational needs. Episcopal leaders, Catholic school educators, researchers, and policy makers are making inroads around the complex reality facing Catholic schools today; slowly but forward! However, without considering the Hispanic Catholic population as an integral partner in the further development of the Catholic Church, faithful Hispanics will abandon the Catholic Church and, by extension, Catholic schooling. A flashback to a period between 2010 and 2013 where Hispanics identifying themselves as Catholic declined by 12% (Funk & Martinez, 2014). Over a period of three years, 4,100,000 Hispanics left the Catholic Church. Church leaders must not allow this to continue to happen again.

On the topic of enrolling more Hispanic children into Catholic schools, as early as the period when Hispanic couples are considering marriage, they often speak of their commitment to send their future children to Catholic schools. They are amenable to enrolling their children in Catholic schools when the time comes; and some may even be predisposed because of attending Catholic schools themselves or simply having an affinity for them. Just as some schools begin to register children in kindergarten at birth, consideration could be given to approaching couples who are soon to be married regarding whether they would want to consider the Catholic school

of the church in which they are getting married. Without providing too much pressure that would cause the couple to take a step backward, parish could provide the name of the couple to the parish or local Catholic schools, after which the school could provide yearly updates to keep the couple informed about the happenings of the school. Since many Hispanic parents select Catholic schools proximate to their homes, information could also be provided to the school(s) closest to the couple's home, so that these schools can develop a relationship with these parents and provide information about themselves and their programs. Knowing that Hispanic mothers are most often responsible for directing the school selection process, Hispanic mothers could also be invited annually or biannually to the Christmas and Easter programs, whereby they could come to know school personnel better and made to feel at home. Home is an important concept for Catholic schools to understand as *mi casa, es tu casa* (my home is your home) is an important adage in the Hispanic household.

Episcopal leaders or Catholic school superintendents could develop an outreach program for Hispanic parents whereby they could be introduced to diocesan structures and seek input as to how the diocese can facilitate the enrollment of their children in Catholic schools. Leaders, understanding that Hispanic parents confront a scarcity of resources, could engage them in attending programs that explain and promote healthy financial stability. Episcopal leaders and superintendents could also develop policies that dedicate ministerial time and resources to serve the financial needs of Hispanic families at the diocesan and parish levels. These same leaders could also invite Hispanic parents who leave the Catholic Church to return to it to renew the sacramental life they have been so used to living as a part of their own nuclear family. This can only serve to make the Church and schools more a part of Hispanic parents' understanding that Church and school is an extension of their extended family.

Catholic universities and colleges across the nation are providing invaluable resources toward the goal of understanding the Hispanic populace. They should continue their research to further understand the Hispanic population, its contributions to the church, and its needs. These areas include the educational needs of Hispanic children, the leadership needs of Hispanic children, reading and early childhood programs based on language and home deficits, and ways to incorporate Hispanic parents into the conversations related to Catholic schools and the Catholic Church.

As Catholic leaders consider implementing the recommendations of this study, they also need to acquire a fuller understanding of the Hispanic people. Respect and honor are two words that define this population well. Hispanics hold respect in high esteem as a means of treating others as the Gospel expects, embracing the Golden Rule. They also hold honor as part of their ethos, not to set themselves apart arrogantly but to embrace honesty; this word is their bond in all they do.

Furthermore, Catholic leaders need to understand the sense and sensibilities of the Hispanic people, how they approach life, and how they navigate its challenges. Understanding the concepts of *acompañamiento* and *la lucha* will transverse the slate upon which Hispanics are understood and upon which conversations can be developed while inviting them to participate in Catholic schools and in the broader church community.

Acompañamiento depicts an act of being—being alongside someone’s everyday joys and struggles—or befriending someone to affirm and value their individual human dignity and worth. *Acompañamiento* is the essence of friendship for Hispanics; this word translates to mean “to accompany on their journey.” *La lucha*, or the struggle, depicts the identity of many Hispanic individuals, be they newly immigrated, second-generation English speakers, or acculturated

third-generation individuals. These words have become “an intrinsic element of the way Hispanics, look at life, face life, and think about themselves... a fundamental concept that captures and synthesizes Hispanic insights, values, and ways of dealing with life” (Goizueta, 2009, p. 335). To accompany Hispanics on their struggle is the highest compliment one can provide them (Isai-Diaz, 2009).

As Catholic leaders continue to embrace the Hispanic population, they need to do so with a certain sensitivity—a sensitivity that provides a loving grandmother the notion that there is a reciprocity for the sacrifices made in life, a sensitivity that provides a long-lost friend with an instant understanding that their life is instantly entwined with theirs, and a sensitivity that extends respect no matter how poor they may be, undereducated they are, or different they may be from the mainstream—to instantly feel that their struggle has led to a place where leaders wish to accompany them on their journey forward. This is essential!

Huegel (2016) described Carolina Fernandez’s sense of *acompañamiento* as a core value of mutuality in her life:

In *acompañamiento* there is a strong physical and spiritual sensation of being in the presence of another person. To walk alongside is not only an emotional or intellectual exercise. *Acompañamiento* is the experience of being formed and transformed by dancing with another person, within the circle of a community, to then take the beauty and grace of that dance to all the other spaces and times where we are called to be present. *Acompañamiento* mutuality is the way we let others know they do not dance alone and we are reminded that we, too, receive the gift of the presence of others in doing so (p. 1).

Recommendations for Future Research

At this juncture in the history of Catholic schools, there is little information or literature available about Catholic education and Hispanic children. This study assists in filling the gap in the literature. The future of Catholic schools remains at risk, though many dioceses, religious organizations, and universities continue to be focused on helping Catholic education grow, prosper, and integrate Hispanics into the mainstream of Catholic schools. Based on the latest studies, there are 55 million Hispanics in the United States, of which close to 55% self-identify as Catholic (Funk & Martinez, 2014; Krogstad & Lopez, 2015a). However, of the 17.9 million Hispanic school-age children, there are only 307,654 Hispanic children enrolled in Catholic schools across the country (McDonald & Schultz, 2016; Patten, 2016). Continued research about Hispanic children in Catholic schools is needed so that further ways of enrolling Hispanic children into Catholic schools can be realized. It is strongly recommended that research continue to explore the role of Hispanics in the church and in Catholic schools, as well as how Hispanics can become part of these institutions based on the concepts of hospitality, welcome, and genuine acompañamiento.

Another potential area of research could be to expand this study, making it national in scope to include a larger sample, including additional subgroups of the Hispanic population. The purpose of such a study would be to validate some of the findings of this study and to learn of the possible variation in the school selection processes used by different Hispanic subgroups. There are 23 different Hispanic population subgroups in the United States (Garoogian, 2013). Other research could be a national study of Catholic schools to determine how many Catholic schools are ministering to Hispanic children, how many are not, the needs of Hispanic children and the programs Catholic schools have developed to meet those needs. Lastly, to further

expand on this research, other studies could involve a national study about the processes all parents use to select Catholic schools. Such a study would help validate the findings of this study and identify the similarities and differences between various groups in terms of how they select Catholic schools for their children. Enrolling more students in Catholic education is one of the components necessary for the continued stability and growth of Catholic schools. Understanding how all groups select their Catholic schools can be most helpful in developing a plan for increased enrollment.

Researcher's Reflections

As I come to the end of this study, I want to reflect on the journey I set upon six years ago; really, a journey that began when I first set foot in a Catholic school thirty-five years ago. The students then, were mostly Mexican and Mexican Americans, the parents were rich, poor and in between and all had desires for their children to be catechized and educated in the Catholic school tradition; so, that opportunities would abound. The various votive candles I lit along the way, gave way to this body of research and those candles have remained bright along the way. It is my intention and sincere hope that what emerges from this study, will light the path for others and for Hispanic Americans across the United States. It can now be said that there is a body of limited research that explored the process Mexican American parents use to select Catholic schools. I offer this study in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Conclusion

This study has identified a unique process used by Mexican American parents to select Catholic schools for their children. The process, constructed around the Friedman and Hechter (1988) rational choice model, shows that Mexican American parents follow the some of the

general constructs in the model, especially, information and negotiation; but use these constructs differently than what is found in the literature. Findings consistent with the literature are the following: mothers direct the process; fathers play a confirming role; and grandparents are involved. Parents also seek schools where their children can be happy meaning schools with structure, proximate to their home and ones in which they can work through the logistics of work. Findings not consistent with the literature are: parents avail themselves of little information before selecting a particular school; parents most often select a single school versus two or three schools; parents receive the majority of their information from the school and not their family or friends – this due to the lack of social networks; the visit with the school principal is considered the most crucial aspect of the school selection process; parents who may be unable to afford tuition, often go ahead and sacrifice and enroll their children in Catholic schools; and most important, Mexican American parents often speak about wanting their children to attend Catholic schools, even before they are married and the children are born. This predisposes them towards enrolling their children in Catholic schools. Lastly, grandparents are credited for helping their grandchildren further develop their faith foundation. This is often what glues the Hispanic family together.

The purpose of this study was to describe the process used by Mexican American parents in selecting Catholic schools for their children. This purpose was derived from the problem of few Hispanics children being enrolled in Catholic schools in the United States. That problem is complex and multifaceted; and its complete resolve is perhaps decades away. However, the results of this study identify steps that can be taken by educators, episcopal leaders and policy makers to respond to the problem of too few Hispanic children in Catholic schools.

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Appendix A

Initial Interview Protocol

Introductory Protocol

Hello, before we get to talking to you about Catholic schools and how you came about choosing one for your son/daughter, I want to review some paperwork with you. As a doctoral student, the Catholic University of America requires that I talk with you about your rights as a participant in my study. This form is called a consent form and explains all that we will be doing and will need to be signed to continue.

Basically, none of the information you give me will be shared with anyone and will only be used for this study. I am going to give you a different name so that no one will ever be able to recognize you through this study. You also have the right to leave the study at any time and all the material I develop from our interview will be kept in a secure place. None of this information will be shared with anyone at your school or anyone at the Archdiocese. It is purely confidential.

Do you have any questions?

To facilitate my note-taking, is it ok for me to tape our conversations?

In addition, please sign these forms to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm to you.

Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

This interview will last 2 hours. As I mentioned early, I would like to know more about how you chose a school for _____. Are you ready?

Do you have any questions? Feel free to stop me at any time and ask any questions you may have.

[INTERVIEW BACKGROUND]

During today's interview, I want to get to know you a bit.

1. What is the name of your son/daughter? Tell me a little about him/her.
2. What's his/her favorite thing about being in school?
3. What school do they go to?
4. How did you go about choosing that school for him/her?

When my kids were born, I know that my wife talked about what we wanted for them and knew the school we would choose would be an important part of who they would become.

5. Did you have similar conversations about what you hope his/her future will be like?
6. Tell me about those conversations?
7. Before you thought about which school he/she would attend, did you develop any kind of goals for them, did you think about what kind of schools you would like him/her to attend?
8. Tell me about that

During the next interview, we are going to talk more about how you came about to choose a Catholic school for your son/daughter. I want to move to another part of my questioning.

Next I want to get to know you a bit.

9. When did you meet?
10. Tell me how you meet? Tell me the story.
 - a. Prompt: location?
 - b. Prompt: marriage?
 - c. Prompt: Did they ever go to church together?
11. Where were you each of you born?
12. Did you attend a Catholic school? What was your experience like? Did you always know that your son/daughter would attend a Catholic school?
13. Tell me about your schooling - elementary, high school or college?
14. Tell me about your Catholic faith. Prompt about Catholic Schools and selection.
15. Prompt: location
 - Prompt: Faith
 - Prompt: Cost
 - Prompt: Good Education
16. Do you think the school meets the needs of your son/daughter or could they provide differently for your son/daughter?
17. Tell me about your parents. Where were, they born? Did they attend Catholic Church? What other ways did they practice their religion? Did either of you attend a Catholic school? Was selecting a Catholic School for your child important? Why? Did being Mexican American influence your selection of a Catholic school for your son/daughter? If so, how?
18. Tell me between both of you, who decided which school your son/daughter would attend?

Mexican American Perceptions about Catholic Schools

19. Tell me about how welcoming you felt in the Catholic schools you visited?
20. Tell me about any symbols within the school you most identified with?
21. What are some of the reasons you chose to enroll in a Catholic school?
22. Do you know of a Catholic school in your area? If so, how is it? What are the difference between Catholic schools and the one your children attend? Where do you feel most comfortable – Public or Catholic?

23. Do you know others who send their children to Catholic schools? What do they think about the Catholic schools?
24. Do you know about the requirements for sending your children to Catholic schools? Tuition? Financial Assistance? Religious requirements? Academic requirements? Language?
25. What are some barriers you believe prevent Mexican Americans from enrolling in Catholic schools?
26. What were the symbols within the school that you most identified with?
27. What changes would the Catholic school have to implement, to make it better?
28. What are the educational benefits you believe your children gain from attending a Catholic school?
29. Why did you choose Catholic education over public education?
30. What do you believe is the difference between Catholic and public schools?
31. How important is education for your children? What role does it play in their lives?
32. What could Catholic parishes and schools do to let parents know about Catholic schools?
33. What do you know about Catholic schools?
34. What are your family or friend's opinion about Catholic schools?
35. What do you think about the cost of Catholic schools?
36. What do you know about financial assistance in Catholic schools?
37. What do you know about religious matters in Catholic schools?
38. What do you know about academic requirements in Catholic schools?
39. What changes would Catholic schools need to make to make them more appealing?

Is there anything that you want to talk to me about in relation to any of the questions I asked or about your son/daughter or anything you may be thinking about Is there anything that you want to talk to me about in relation to any of the questions I asked or about your son/daughter or anything you may be thinking about?

Next time we meet we will be talking more specifically about the way you chose a Catholic school for your son/daughter. I can hardly wait.

Do you have any questions? We need to decide when to meet. Do you have any suggestions? Is this a good place to meet, or would you like to meet elsewhere?

Appendix B

Follow-up Interview Protocol

How are you doing today?

Today's interview will deal with the process you used to select a Catholic school for your son/daughter. I will be asking you how you went about selecting schools for their kids. What I want to learn is about how you all came about selecting a Catholic school.

Any questions?

[GENERAL QUESTIONS]

1. How did you choose school? _____.
2. Before you started thinking about which schools your son/daughter would attend, did you have an idea of which other schools you would consider? Tell me about those schools.
Prompt: Why were you interested in those schools?
3. Were there any schools that you did not consider? Prompt: Tell me about those? What was it about them that made you remove them from your list?
 - a. Prompt: Cost
 - b. Prompt: Admissions Process
 - c. Prompt: Location
 - d. Not a friendly environment
 - e. Friends told you not to apply

[WHO CHOOSES]

4. So, slowly walk me through the journey of how you chose school: _____.
What happened first...How did you find out about the school?
5. From start to finish, how long did it take you to choose _____. Was it a difficult choice? Prompt: Considerations and ask if each of them had different considerations.
6. When you were looking at which school your son/daughter would attend, were both of you involved in making the decision? Prompt: Explain to me your role.
7. Were either of you more involved than the other? If so, who? Tell me about it?
8. Did one of you try to convince the other? How did that work?
9. What about other people? Did anyone in your family or friends help you make the decision?
10. As you began thinking about schools, did you develop a list of schools that you wanted to consider? Discuss.
11. When it came to making the final decision, who made the final decision?
12. How did you make the final decision? Tell me about that? Did either one of you want a different school? Prompt: how did they resolve the issue.

[GATHERING AND USE OF INFORMATION]

After you had made a list of schools that you would consider for your son/daughter, what did you do next?

13. How did you find out information about the schools you were looking at? Prompt: schools visit? Phone calls? Website? Friends? What happened next? Tell me about it.
14. Prompt – hot knowledge, cold knowledge, how did you gather it, how did you use it?
15. After initially finding out about the school, how did you gather more information?
16. Did you use the Internet to gather information? Listservs? Tell me about the kind of information you gathered? How did it help you make the decision of sending your son/daughter to the school you picked?
17. Where did you get other information? School, open houses, from friends, from family, from teachers, in the mail? What kind of information was helpful to you?
18. How did you sort through the information?
19. What information helped you most?
20. How long did it take you to get the information you needed? Prompt: Timeline beginning in (try to get actual months)
21. Did you not get information that you thought would have been helpful?
22. When did you stop gathering information? (again, try to get a month)
23. When thinking the initial list of schools, you were to consider, did any of the information cause you to change any school on your initial list? If so, tell me more.
24. What was most useful—information from people or information that you gathered from the school or both? Tell me about this... Prompt: which one was most useful in helping them decide.
25. Can you give me examples of information that came from friends or other people that you used?
26. Could you give me an example of one type of information that came from schools that you used?
27. How did information impact your decision of which school your son/daughter would eventually attend?
28. Once you got the information what did you do? Prompt: Journey

Do you want to take a break?

You mentioned that you initially made a list of schools that you wanted to consider as a possible school for your son/daughter. Once you looked at the various pieces of information, you may have changed your list based on that information. Tell me about what you did next?

[NEGOTIATED ACTIONS]

29. At this point, tell me about what kind of conversations, you both had in developing the list of schools that you would continue to consider? Were there other people involved in the decision making?

30. How did those conversations go? Prompt: Can you give me an example of what you discussed?
31. What kind of things became important during the discussion?
 - a. Prompt: Academic Achievement
 - b. Catholic
 - c. Finances
 - d. Location
 - e. Support
 - f. Feeling comfortable with the environment.
 - g. Parish School
32. Was there a school that came in second? Tell me about that. If so, how did that work when you began to think about what you wanted for your son/daughter?
33. When thinking about schools, were there any that you would not consider? Could you tell me about those and why you would not consider? Prompt:
34. Did you not consider them because it was a type of school that you did not want to consider or was it because of something that the school had that made you not consider it? Religious vs private? Larger school vs smaller school? Close to home vs far away? Affiliated to religious order vs run by lay? Your own alma mater?

[THE AGGREGATION MECHANISM]

NOTE: In this section, much of the discussion will be about summarizing what the participants previously answered and to place importance to each and to also get an idea of how these various things impacted the process of school selection. Taking all the various sections into consideration, to see if the participants can outline a process of school selection even if it is different from the theoretical framework.

We've talked about how you were involved in the process of picking a school for your _____ and how you gathered and used information to help you figure out which he/she would attend.

We also spoke about your first list of schools versus your second and how that list was changed perhaps due to due to finances, things that were important to you or things about the school. We also spoke about the goals you have for _____.

During this last section of interview questions, I want to see if we can talk about the various steps in this process, which impacted your decision most and what you think about the general process you used to select a Catholic school for your son/daughter.

35. In talking with you about how you went about picking a Catholic school, from an initial list of schools, to the gathering and use of information and the conversations, negotiations, discussions, and debates about which school your children would attend, tell me how you would describe this journey to someone else who was interested in finding a school for their child.

36. What was the most important thing that you did? What would you do differently?
37. Is there anything else you would add?

We have come to the end of our interview. Thank you so much for letting me talk with you. What you have told me will make an impact for Catholic education and for Mexican Americans as they seek to raise their children in the faith. Thanks, you so much.

I will be contacting you by email next week to send you a transcript of our interview by email. I will ask that you review it to see if there are any changes that you may want to make. Would you want it by email or would you like to meet to review it? What is your email address?

Thanks so much!

Appendix E

Categorization Matrix of Analysis

Categorization Matrix

Who Decides

Mother
 Father
 Grandparent
 Other

Information

Cold Knowledge
 Internet
 Friends
 Family
 Others
 Hot Knowledge
 Internet
 Friends
 Family
 Others

Negotiated Actions

Children Goals
 Hierarchy of Preferences
 Opportunity Costs
 Scarcity of Resources
 Institutional Constraints

Aggregation Mechanism

Info-Preferences-Outcome
 Info-Opportunity Costs-Outcome
 Info-Scarcity of Resources-Outcome
 Info-Constraints-Outcome
 Other

Cultural Factors

Inductive Factors - Unconstrained Matrix

Appendix D IRB Certificate



THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services
Washington, DC 20064
202- 319-5218

January 21, 2016

Mr. Gilbert Saenz
1155 Bluff Forest
San Antonio, TX 78248

Subject: Project title **"The Process of Mexican-American Catholic School Selection"**
Protocol No. **16-002**

Dear Mr. Saenz:

Your research for the subject project was reviewed by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, and has been certified as exempt under 45 CFR 46.101. Certification expires **01/18/19** as long as no changes are made to the protocol. If changes are made, or if the research continues beyond three years, re-submission to the IRB must be made.

Enclosed is an approved copy of the exemption certificate.

Sincerely,

Ralph Albano
Secretary
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects


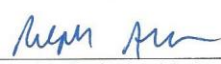
Enclosure

cc: [] Dr. Schuttloffel

16-002 AEP 01/16/16
[378]

Appendix E

IRB Exemption Certificate

 THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (CPHS)	
EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE	
<u>Gilbert L Saenz</u> <i>Principal Investigator's Name</i>	<u>December 15, 2015</u> <i>Date</i>
<u>School of Arts & Science</u> <i>School</i>	<u>Education</u> <i>Department</i>
<u>The Process of Mexican-American School Selection</u> <i>Title of Study</i>	
<u>Mervlann J. Schuttloffel, Ph.D.</u> <i>Faculty Advisor (if Student PI)</i>	FWA00004459
<p>The project is exempt under the following category of 45 CFR 46.101:</p> <p>1. (b) (1) <input type="checkbox"/> Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as a) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or b) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instruction techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.</p> <p>2. (b) (2) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.</p> <p>3. (b) (3) <input type="checkbox"/> Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under (2), it: a) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or b) federal statutes(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.</p> <p>4. (b) (4) <input type="checkbox"/> Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.</p> <p>5. (b) (5) <input type="checkbox"/> Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of the department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: a) Public benefit or service programs; b) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; c) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.</p> <p>6. (b) (6) <input type="checkbox"/> Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, a) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or b) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.</p>	
<p>Certification as Exempt:</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-end;"> <div style="width: 60%;">  <hr/> Secretary of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects </div> <div style="width: 35%; text-align: right;"> <u>1/20/16</u> <hr/> Date </div> </div>	