

Why do Parents Choose Independent Catholic Schools?
A Qualitative Study of High School Choice in Winnipeg, Canada

by

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Abstract

Although they educate a sizeable minority of the province's students, there has been little research done on Catholic schools in Manitoba. This thesis begins to fill a void in one area of that research: parental school choice of Winnipeg's Catholic high schools. Beginning with a broad overview of Catholic school choice and reviewing literature from Canada, Australia, and the United States, this thesis explores which parents choose Winnipeg's Catholic high schools and what reasons they have for doing so. It draws on three interrelated social theories—social identity, secular goods, and vicarious religion—for its theoretical base, alongside Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*. Semi-structured interviews with 13 parents were conducted between November 2019 and March 2020. Findings from these interviews indicated that religious and academic reasons were parents' primary selection criteria. Parental education and generational effects also correlated with parental choice of Winnipeg's Catholic schools. Further research should be done on the motivations of non-Christian parents in selecting these schools, as well as parents who considered Catholic schools but opted for alternatives.

Keywords: Catholic schools, independent schools, *habitus*, interview-based qualitative research, parental choice, religious capital, school choice, secular goods theory, social identity theory, theory of vicarious religion

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Emilia,
to my children Leo, Cecilia, and Zoe,
to my canine companion Cindy,
to the loving memory of my grandfather
Leo Kelsch
without whom I would have no “conviction of things not seen,”

and

to the Faculty, Staff, and Students of
Saint Paul’s High School.

How much better to get wisdom than gold!
To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.
- Proverbs 16:16 (NRSVCE) -

Contents

TITLE PAGE _____	I
ABSTRACT _____	II
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS _____	III
DEDICATION _____	IV
CONTENTS _____	V
LIST OF TABLES _____	VIII
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION _____	1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM _____	3
DEFINING SCHOOL CHOICE _____	4
A REVIEW OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL CHOICE IN CANADA _____	6
<i>Denominational (Roman Catholic and Protestant) Education Rights: Section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867</i> _____	6
<i>Catholic School Choice throughout Canada</i> _____	7
<i>Catholic Theology and School Choice</i> _____	9
<i>Present State of School Choice in Canada</i> _____	12
<i>A Brief Summary of Catholic School Choice Literature</i> _____	13
<i>Theories Applicable to Catholic School Choice</i> _____	16
LOCAL CONTEXT: CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS IN WINNIPEG _____	17
<i>Saint Boniface Diocesan High School</i> _____	17
<i>Saint Mary's Academy</i> _____	18
<i>Saint Maurice School</i> _____	18
<i>Saint Paul's High School</i> _____	18
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE _____	19
RESEARCH QUESTIONS _____	19
SIGNIFICANCE _____	19
CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS _____	21
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW _____	22
INTRODUCTION _____	22
ENROLMENT, GOVERNANCE, AND FUNDING OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES, AUSTRALIA, AND CANADA _____	23
<i>United States</i> _____	23
<i>Australia</i> _____	24
<i>Canada</i> _____	25
WHICH PARENTS CHOOSE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: DEMOGRAPHIC MARKERS _____	26
<i>Parental Education</i> _____	26
United States. _____	27
Australia. _____	28
Canada. _____	28
<i>Parental Religion</i> _____	29
United States. _____	30
Australia. _____	31

Canada. _____	32
<i>Family Income</i> _____	34
United States. _____	34
Australia. _____	34
Canada. _____	36
WHY PARENTS CHOOSE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS _____	38
<i>Quality of Education and Student Achievement</i> _____	39
United States. _____	40
Australia. _____	41
Canada. _____	42
<i>Religious Instruction</i> _____	42
United States. _____	43
Australia. _____	44
Canada. _____	45
<i>Affordability</i> _____	46
United States. _____	47
Australia. _____	48
Canada. _____	49
CONCLUSION _____	50
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK _____	51
BOURDIEU'S <i>HABITUS</i> _____	52
SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY _____	53
SECULAR GOODS THEORY _____	56
VICARIOUS RELIGION THEORY _____	57
APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK _____	58
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY _____	59
PARADIGM _____	59
METHODOLOGY _____	60
PARTICIPANTS _____	62
METHODS _____	63
<i>Sampling and Recruitment</i> _____	63
<i>Data Collection</i> _____	64
<i>Data Analysis</i> _____	64
CREDIBILITY _____	66
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS _____	67
RESEARCHER REFLEXIVITY AND POSITIONALITY _____	69
ASSUMPTIONS _____	71
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS _____	72
THE SOCIOECONOMIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL PARENTS _____	72
<i>Participant Education</i> _____	74
<i>Participant Religion</i> _____	75
Non-Catholic Christians. _____	76
Catholics. _____	78
<i>Less-Practicing Catholics.</i> _____	78
<i>More-Practicing Catholics.</i> _____	81

<i>Participant Family Income</i> _____	82
<i>Other Demographic Data</i> _____	84
Marital Status. _____	84
National Origin and Language. _____	85
RELIGIOUS, ACADEMIC, AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOL CHOICE _____	86
<i>Theme One: Religious Attitudes in Participant School Choice Decisions</i> _____	87
<i>Theme Two: Intrinsic Considerations in Participant School Choice Decisions</i> _____	92
Academic Considerations. _____	92
Perceptions of Other Students and the School Environment. _____	97
Financial Considerations. _____	99
Other Intrinsic Considerations. _____	102
Distance from Home. _____	103
Single-Sex or Co-Educational Schools. _____	105
Miscellaneous Intrinsic Considerations. _____	106
<i>Theme Three: Extrinsic Considerations in Participant School Choice Decisions</i> _____	107
Influences by Family and/or Friends. _____	108
Child Involvement in School Choice Decisions. _____	111
CONCLUSION _____	112
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS _____	115
MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS _____	115
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY _____	116
IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS _____	120
<i>Government</i> _____	120
<i>Public Schools</i> _____	121
<i>Secular Independent Schools</i> _____	122
<i>Other Religious Schools</i> _____	123
<i>Other Catholic Schools</i> _____	124
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION _____	125
REFERENCES _____	129
APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE _____	147
APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PRINCIPALS _____	148
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT LETTER _____	150
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM _____	152
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL _____	155

List of Tables

Table 1 – Manitoba’s Catholic High Schools _____ 17

Table 2 – Participant Demographic Data _____ 73

Chapter One: Introduction

In perhaps no country in the world is it more interesting to study Catholic schools than Canada. Indeed, Canada's very existence as a country was predicated on (among other things) a compromise about the special place of Catholic schools within Canadian society and the ability for parents to freely choose them. Nowadays, Catholic schools in Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan are fully publicly funded, and they receive partial funding in many other provinces and territories. But the ability for parents to choose Canada's Catholic schools is not without controversy. For instance, the Government of Saskatchewan has threatened to invoke the *Notwithstanding Clause* of the Canadian Constitution to ensure that Catholic school choice remains available even to non-Catholic students (Langenegger, 2017). And in Manitoba, Catholic schools once caused a crisis that toppled a federal government and prompted a papal encyclical, *Affari Vos* (Leo XIII, 1897). For better or for worse, Catholic schools are a unique part of the historical, political, and legal foundation of Canada. Yet, they remain grossly understudied in Canadian educational literature. This thesis aims to fill this gap by exploring parental choice of Catholic schools in Winnipeg, where Catholic schools are partially funded by the government and where parents pay tuitions to enrol their children.

Because K-12 education in Canada is a provincial responsibility, each province's relationship with its Catholic schools is unique. In Manitoba, Catholic schools are almost all independent, but receive partial funding from the provincial government.¹ In the 2019-2020 school year, Manitoba's independent Catholic schools educated about 5200

¹ There is one publicly-funded Catholic school in Manitoba: St Augustine's in Brandon School Division. Its existence is something of an anomaly.

students, approximately 35% of all students enrolled in funded independent schools, and about 2.4% of the total enrolment of students throughout the province. Independent Catholic schools exist only in Winnipeg, though, where they account for approximately 5% of the student population (Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). This means that about a third of Manitoba's population—those who live outside Winnipeg—are not able to opt for Catholic schooling.

Despite educating more students than the majority of Manitoba's public school divisions, Manitoba's Catholic schools are something of a mystery. For instance, among the few major studies that have researched Catholic schools in Canada, none exist that are specific to Manitoba, a peculiarity considering the relative uniqueness of its semi-independent funding model. Indeed, most studies focus on Ontario or Alberta's Catholic schools, and their findings are not necessarily applicable elsewhere since these provinces fully-fund their Catholic schools. These studies also rarely focus on school choice, and if they do, Catholic schools are rarely disaggregated from larger data pools. There are also few studies on what effects these Catholic schools have—if any—as contrasted with their public counterparts. And, considering the ubiquity of school choice throughout the public school system in Manitoba, no study exists that can explain why parents choose Catholic schools over public ones. Although some studies have been done about independent school choice in Manitoba, they do not focus specifically on Catholic schools and, as elsewhere, Catholic schools are not identified specifically in the data. Thus, this thesis aims to address a part of the school choice question: why do some parents choose independent Catholic high schools for their children in Manitoba?

This chapter begins with a statement of the research problem, identifying a gap in research about Manitoba's Catholic schools. Thereafter comes an historical and legal review of Catholic school choice in Canada, followed by a review of Catholic teaching on school choice, then a brief overview of the present state of school choice in Canada, and concluding with a brief review of relevant literature and theory. This leads to the statement of purpose and research questions, and to an exploration of the significance that this study may have for various stakeholders. The chapter terminates with a list of conceptual definitions that are used throughout the thesis.

Statement of the Problem

Considering how many parents choose Catholic schools in Manitoba, it is problematic that research has never been undertaken to understand why they make this choice. The government, public schools, and independent schools (both secular and religious) would all benefit from knowing more about Catholic school choice in Manitoba, allowing each stakeholder to make more educated decisions in their individual areas of concern. The few studies that exist about school choice in Manitoba tend to be non-specific, researching Manitoba's independent schools in general. Otherwise, they are homogenous, lumping Catholic schools together with other schools.²

On one hand, the dearth of studies is understandable: Catholic schools educate only about 5200 students, a small segment of Manitoba's population. On the other hand, the fact that Manitoba's Catholic schools educate more students than many of Manitoba's

² For instance, Janzen (2002) explored the reasons that parents choose any independent school in Manitoba; only one of the schools in his studies was Catholic. Friesen (1998) wrote his master's thesis on a similar topic: why Manitoban parents move their children from public to independent schools. Catholic schools were part of the sample, but were grouped with other independent schools.

other divisions is interesting, especially since all of Manitoba's independent Catholic schools charge tuition. This suggests that parents have important reasons for choosing these schools over their public alternatives, and that these reasons are sufficiently compelling to merit an often-substantial commitment of resources.

Catholic school choice has been studied elsewhere in Canada, especially in Ontario, which has the largest Catholic-school enrolment in the country (Allison, 2015; Bosetti et al., 2017; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016; Davies & Aurini, 2011). But Ontario's Catholic schools are fully-funded and located in most communities, so choosing them is less constrained than in Manitoba. Studies in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have looked to the question too, but their Catholic schools and social contexts are not identical to Canada's.

Manitoba's Catholic schools are many and multifaceted, organizations far too complex to discuss as a whole in one thesis. But, it is important to understand why they are chosen over public schools. Doing so may help Catholic schools better attract students and understand how best they can be served and retained. Public schools may be able to identify limitations in their own programming through which they may be losing students. The Manitoba government will be better able to make decisions about how schooling should be managed. Finally, knowing why parents choose Catholic high schools will allow families to make more educated decisions in their choice of schools.

Defining School Choice

Before reviewing school choice in Canada, it is important to define the term itself. Brighthouse (2000) defines school choice as "schemes that officially and directly give weight to parents' preferences regarding the allocation of their children to schools" (pp.

22-23). In Manitoba, the Ministry of Education has its own definition, too: “the ability to choose a school to be attended inside or outside of [one’s] home division” (Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 2020). Of course, parents can also make unofficial school choice decisions (such as moving into the catchment area of better schools). As such, Bosetti and Gereluk (2016) frame Brighthouse’s (2000) definition in the Canadian context as “choice within the broad policy framework known as public education” (p. 11). In their definition of public education, they include public schools, whether secular or religious; language immersion programs; alternative programs/schools; charter schools (Alberta only); independent schools, most of which are Catholic or Protestant (but which include other religious and secular schools as well); homeschooling; online learning; and intra-district open enrolment schemes (pp. 11-14).

Although the definition laid out in the previous paragraph is comprehensive as to the state of school choice in Canada, the term ‘school choice’ can itself be misleading. For instance, the word ‘choice’ implies a level of freedom that does not truly exist when selecting a school. There are innumerable obstacles that might interfere with a family’s choice, in spite of governments weighing parents’ “preferences” (Brighthouse, 2000, pp. 22–23). A family’s preferred school might charge tuition that is beyond a family’s means, might be too far from home, or instruction in a particular language may not be available. Certain social structures might make a choice more difficult (Yoon & Lubienski, 2017). In short, school choice is always constrained and influenced by circumstances that might be beyond the control of families. A review of many of the complexities that have affected school choice in Canada follows.

A Review of Catholic School Choice in Canada

The ability of parents to select schools—Catholic or otherwise—is highly regionalized in Canada since responsibility for education is a provincial right devolved under section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* (previously the *British North America Act, 1867*) and reaffirmed under the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Section 93 gives provincial legislatures the right “to exclusively make Laws in reference to Education” (*Constitution Act, 1982*). As a result, it is difficult to discuss provisions for school choice in Canada as a whole. Rather, each province and territory has its own policies (*Constitution Act, 1867*; *Constitution Act, 1982*).

Denominational (Roman Catholic and Protestant) Education Rights: Section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867

Catholic school choice in Canada traces its roots to before Confederation, where movements to make education more egalitarian gained strong popular support across the country (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016). School choice in general found its way into the constitutional agenda as a result of French Catholic and English Protestant linguistic and religious tensions that made it difficult for the nascent federal government to agree to a national framework for education. Instead, the decision was made to hand responsibility for education to the provinces, with the caveat that the religious minorities in each province (Roman Catholics or Protestants only) would have a constitutionally-guaranteed right to establish their own schools (though only where these schools were already established). This protected the rights of the minority Roman Catholic population in Ontario and the minority Protestant population in Quebec (Bayefsky & Walman, 2007; Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016).

Section 93 of the Constitution subsequently came to include four clauses that affect the right of students to be educated in Catholic or Protestant schools (which intrinsically included language rights, since the overwhelming majority of French-speakers were Catholic and English-speakers were Protestant). The preamble and first clause are worth quoting in their entirety:

In and for each Province the Legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education, subject and according to the following Provisions:

(1) Nothing in any such Law shall prejudicially affect any Right or Privilege with respect to Denominational Schools which any Class of Persons have by Law in the Province at the Union. (*Constitution Act, 1982*)

Simplifying the legalese, Brown and Zuker (2007) summarize section 93 by stating that “[p]rovincial laws about education may not prejudicially affect the rights to denominational schools that were in effect at the time of Confederation” (p. 13).³

Catholic School Choice throughout Canada

Section 93’s provisions must be followed by all provinces, but only according to the legal status quo in place in each at the time of their joining Canada. Of the four original provinces that constituted Canada in 1867, only Ontario and Quebec had legally established separate school systems. Thus, section 93 does not have a significant effect in New Brunswick or Nova Scotia (Bushnell, 1992; *Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association v. Ontario (Attorney General)*, 2001). And, although Quebec had a separate school system at Confederation, a 1997 constitutional amendment made section 93 of no

³ The other three clauses concern equality of Roman Catholic education in Ontario with Protestant education in Quebec (clause 2) and remedial measures the federal government may use to enforce the section (subsections 3 and 4).

force there (cf. *Constitution Act, 1982*, s. 93A). Newfoundland and Labrador made a similar amendment in 1998, unifying all of its separate school boards into one publicly-funded and non-denominational school board but leaving provisions for some religious education (cf. *Constitution Amendment Proclamation, 1998 (Newfoundland Act)*).

Section 93 also has limited effect in Prince Edward Island since they had no legally established separate school boards when they joined Confederation (Bushnell, 1992).

Ontario maintains a separate Roman Catholic school system consisting of 29 English Catholic and 8 French Catholic school boards. There is also one Protestant separate school board (consisting of a single school), also fully-funded in accordance with section 93. Catholic school boards in Ontario are allowed to give preferential access to Catholics in kindergarten through grade eight as allowed by the Constitution, but when the provincial government extended funding to Catholic high schools it came with the caveat that the schools must admit any students in their catchment areas regardless of their religious affiliation (Bosetti et al., 2017).

Alberta and Saskatchewan also have separate Catholic school boards. In Saskatchewan, both Catholic and non-Catholic students can access public Catholic schools without impediment (Bosetti et al., 2017). In Alberta, the same is true, though Catholics are technically obliged to enrol their children in Catholic schools in the first instance.⁴

British Columbia, the territories, and Manitoba all partially-fund their Catholic schools. Manitoba's history relating to Catholic school choice is more complicated than most. As Manitoba was settled, both Catholics and Protestants desired religious schools.

⁴ For more on this irregularity, see *Schmidt v. Calgary Board of Education* (1976).

In 1870, these schools were funded by tuition fees and church revenues. But as Manitoba grew, the provincial Board of Education established 12 Protestant and 12 Catholic schools that received public funds and that were publicly managed. Both groups of schools received an annual grant from the government, and the schools could also levy school taxes on members of their respective churches (Bale, 1985; Jensen, 1999; Lang, 1914).

This dual system continued in various iterations until the 1890s when Manitoba Premier Thomas Greenway passed a revised *Public Schools Act* that removed funding from both Catholic and Protestant schools and created a single secular public school system. Greenway's act was appealed all the way to the Privy Council in London (the court of highest appeal at the time), which determined it did not contravene the *Manitoba Act* (1870). Pressure began to mount over this decision, and the Privy Council ruled that the federal government could enact remedial legislation under section 93 of the *British North America Act, 1867* to force the government to fund religious schools once again. Prime Minister Mackenzie Bowell's government did just that, but the action was so unpopular that he lost the confidence of the House of Commons and an election was called. Wilfrid Laurier's government was elected. Laurier found a compromise that saw Catholic schools permitted to operate but without funding. Moreover, Catholic religious education could occur in public schools if there were certain numbers of Catholics. The situation was not as favourable as what had existed previously, but even the pope concurred that the situation was as fair as possible (Jensen, 1999; Lang, 1914).

Nowadays, Manitoba's relationship to its Catholic schools continues to be fairly unique.

Catholic Theology and School Choice

The Catholic Church teaches that parents have the primary responsibility for overseeing their children's education (*Code of Canon Law*, 1983; Pace, 1909; Paul VI, 1965; Wilken, 2004). In the early Church, children's education usually focused on moral education and memorization of the Bible, and mostly took place on an individual basis in the home (Pace, 1909; Wilken, 2004). Eventually, Christian families began entrusting education of their children to catechetical and monastic schools; some of the latter eventually developed into universities (Pace, 1909; Ryan et al., 1912).

Over time, different papal pronouncements continued to advocate for parental control of children's education, often producing florid admonishments of non-Catholic education. One such memorable excerpt came from Leo XIII's encyclical *Sapientiae Christianae* (1890), where he notes that it is "incumbent on parents to strain every nerve...to keep [their children] away from schools where there is risk of their drinking in the poison of impiety" (s. 42). But, it was not until 1965 that the Catholic Church produced its first truly comprehensive declaration concerning the nature of Catholic education: *Gravissimum Educationis*.

Gravissimum Educationis is replete with references to parental involvement and choice in education. It states that "[s]ince parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators" (Paul VI, 1965, s. 3). The Church places a similar obligation on civil society to aid parents in educating their children. Society must "protect the duties and rights of parents...according to the principal of subsidiarity...to carry out the work of education in accordance with the wishes of the parents..." (Paul VI, 1965, s. 3). Implicit in these statements is a philosophical

orientation towards liberal school choice policies that favour parental autonomy. The declaration further states that “parents...must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools” (Paul VI, 1965, s. 6). The same section also supports a voucher-style system to ameliorate school choice: “the public power...must see to it...that public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children.”

Though *Gravissimum Educationis* suggests parental freedom of choice, Catholic parents are, in fact, obligated to entrust their children to Catholic schools where local circumstances make doing so possible. In the 1917 version of the *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1215 stipulates that “Catholic children are to be educated in schools where not only nothing contrary to Catholic faith and morals is taught, but rather in schools where religious and moral training occupy the first place” (Woywod, 1918). Furthermore, “Catholic children shall not attend non-Catholic, indifferent, schools that are mixed, that is to say, schools open to Catholics and non-Catholics alike” (Woywod, 1918, c. 1217). The 1983 revision to the *Code of Canon Law* adopted more conciliatory language while maintaining continuity with the earlier law. It states that “Catholic parents have...the duty and right of choosing those means and institutions through which they can provide more suitably for the Catholic education of their children, according to local circumstances” (*Code of Canon Law*, 1983, c. 793 § 1). Canons 797 and 798 address the obligation for Catholic parents to opt for Catholic schooling for their children. The latter canon adds an important caveat, suggesting that if local circumstances make choosing Catholic education impractical or impossible, the parents must arrange for suitable catechesis by some other means (*Code of Canon Law*, 1983)

Present State of School Choice in Canada

Yoon and Lubienski (2017) note that few studies have paid close attention to school choice in Canada, perhaps because of the country's diversity of school choice policies resulting from the devolution of education to provincial governments. They also note that Canada's multiculturalism policies have resulted in large immigrant communities spread unequally throughout the country resulting in unique regional effects on school choice decisions. Increasingly, this means that since more popular schools tend to be located in more affluent areas, marginalized communities (for instance, communities of new immigrants, or those with high populations of the materially poor) are often constrained in their ability to choose schools (Yoon, 2016). As such, rather than identifying Canada's disparate school systems as a weakness for school choice research, Yoon and Lubienski (2017) suggest that the rise in school choice programs throughout Canada offer a variety of novel avenues through which school choice might be explored.

Davies and Aurini (2011) note that Canadian school choice policies are meant to allow parents greater influence over their children's educations "by extending the variety of school types, by expanding publicly available information about schools, and by expanding parental capacities to choose" (p. 460). Holmes (2008) divides school choice in Canada into five different areas where choice can be exercised outside of the secular, publicly-funded system provided by each province. They are: (a) minority language education (either French or English, depending on the province), (b) alternative schools (IB schools, for example), (c) publicly-funded Roman Catholic separate schools (in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario only), (d) charter schools (Alberta only), and (e) independent schools (pp. 199-202). Additionally, all provinces also allow parents to

homeschool their children (Bosetti, Van Pelt, & Allison, 2017; Van Pelt, 2015), with Alberta and some areas of Saskatchewan and British Columbia even providing partial funding for homeschooled children (Van Pelt, 2015). Canadian parents and students have many options for choice already, and new options are always being added (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016; Bosetti, Van Pelt, & Allison, 2017; Davies & Aurini, 2011; Van Pelt, 2015).

A Brief Summary of Catholic School Choice Literature

Catholic school choice schemes in both Australia and the United States are generally more straightforward than in Canada. For instance, all Catholic schools in Australia are funded at approximately 70% of the grant given to secular public schools, so parental tuitions to cover the difference are relatively modest (Donnelly, 2012; National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). In the United States, the opposite is true: Catholic schools are never directly funded, although families may be able to use educational vouchers to select them in certain states. U.S. Catholic schools are all independent, and tuitions tends to be high. This can place them out of reach of many families, and is one of several potential causes of declining enrolment (James, 2007).

School choice systems tend to be accessed by certain demographics of parents. For instance, parents with higher levels of formal education are more likely to make choices about their children's schools, though it is not always possible to account for choice of Catholic schools specifically within these groups. Nevertheless, parental education strongly correlates with more participation in school choice schemes in Canada, Australia, and the United States (Buddin et al., 1998; Davies & Aurini, 2011; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Ogawa & Dutton, 1997; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004).

Similarly, parental religion tends to be suggestive of parents using school choice schemes. Direct studies of parental religion as it relates to school choice have been done in the United States and have found strong correlations between parental religion and choice of religious schools, especially among Catholics (Ajuwon & Bradshaw, 2009; Prichard & Swezey, 2016; Sander, 2005b; Sander & Cohen-Zada, 2012; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). The same is true among Australian Catholics (Anderson, 1988; Dearden et al., 2011; Kelley & Evans, 2004). In Canada, it is clear that religious parents are more likely to choose religious schools, but Catholics are not often specifically identified (Bosetti, 2004; Davies & Aurini, 2011; Janzen, 2002).

Finally, family income tends to be a major determiner of religious school choice, especially in the United States. There, studies have found that more parents would likely choose religious schools if tuition were no barrier (Reichard, 2012; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). Family income is less of a factor in Australia, since tuitions for Catholic schools are usually well below the costs of independent schools (Dearden et al., 2011; Kelley & Evans, 2004). In Canada, it seems that family income is a determinant when selecting for religious independent schools. But, because most studies are done in Ontario or Alberta—where Catholic schools are public and therefore free—it is difficult to determine what role family income plays in Catholic school choice throughout the country (Bosetti, 2004; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007).

What are parents looking for in Catholic schools? Ajuwon and Bradshaw (2009) found that, among religious parents, educational quality, religious instruction, and affordability were the most important school choice selection factors. In general, there are few studies from Canada and Australia that suggest that Catholic schools are

academically superior to secular ones, but in the United States there are myriad.

However, whether or not Catholic School Effects (CSEs) exist—that is, whether or not Catholic schools somehow improve students’ academic performances—is mostly moot: there is at least an impression they do, especially among some American parents (Guzmán et al., 2012). Lankford and Wyckoff (1992) found that Catholic school parents were more concerned about academic performance than parents of other denominations.

On the other hand, there are a plethora of studies that suggest that parents choose Catholic schools for the religious instruction that they provide, especially among U.S. and Canadian Catholics (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; A. Friesen, 1998; Guzmán et al., 2012; Hoxby, 1998; Janzen, 2002; Ji & Boyatt, 2007; Reichard, 2012). The same is not true of Australian Catholic families, who tend to order religious instruction quite low when discussing their considerations for Catholic schools (Mok & Flynn, 2004; Rymarz, 2013).

Affordability is another factor, particularly among U.S. families. In general, as financial barriers are reduced, enrolment in U.S. Catholic schools tends to increase (Fleming et al., 2015; Ji & Boyatt, 2007; Lankford & Wyckoff, 1992; Reichard, 2012; Wallace, 1999). Among Australian families, affordability tends to be a concern primarily for those choosing independent schools, most of which are not Catholic. Kelley and Evans (2004) note that students in Australia’s Catholic schools benefit from fairly low tuitions to begin with, and they can also often access a variety of financial supports. In Canada, affordability in Catholic school choice depends largely upon one’s province of residence. Studies from Alberta have indicated that as many as 47% of public school parents (including Catholic school families) would likely choose independent schools if cost were no object (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007). This indicates that affordability matters in

choice of independent schools, but not necessarily Catholic schools. There appear to be no studies on school choice affordability in provinces where Catholic schools are independent.

A more detailed discussion of the literature relevant to this thesis is found in chapter two.

Theories Applicable to Catholic School Choice

Two theories that directly address the question of choice of a religious school choice throughout educational literature include social identity theory and secular goods theory (Pelz & den Dulk, 2018). Social identity theory suggests that parents choose religious schools in order to replicate their own religious identities in their children; the theory seems founded on Bourdieu's theory of religious *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1986; Rey, 2004) and Iannaccone's (1990) theories of the transmission of religious capital. Pelz and den Dulk's (2018) also suggest that parents choose religious schools for their secular benefits, like strong academic performance or location. This they call secular goods theory.

A final theory that may shed light on choice of Catholic schools is Davie's (2007) theory of vicarious religion. First applied to Catholic schools by Rymarz (2013), vicarious religious suggests that parents may be exercising their own religious *habitus* vicariously; that is, through their children's enrolment in a religious school. This may explain why parents who are only (or primarily) passively or culturally religious are still significantly more likely to enrol their children in religious schools. Chapter three discusses each of these theories in more detail.

Local Context: Catholic High Schools in Winnipeg

Despite the considerable scope of school choice options for families in Manitoba, there are only four Catholic high schools, all situated within Winnipeg's two Latin-rite Catholic archdioceses: the Archdiocese of Winnipeg (which consists of most of southwestern Manitoba, and most of Winnipeg west of the Red River), and the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface (consisting of most of Winnipeg east of the Red River, and most of southeastern Manitoba).⁵ A summary of the demographic information about each of the schools is located in table one (below).

Table 1: Manitoba's Catholic High Schools

Name	9-12 Enrolment	Archdiocese	Type of School	Co-Ed or Single Sex	Tuition	Participated in Study
<i>St Boniface Diocesan High School</i>	172	Saint Boniface	Diocesan	Co-Ed	\$4200	No
<i>St Mary's Academy</i>	437	Winnipeg	Religious order	Females only	\$7890	Yes
<i>St Maurice School</i>	188	Winnipeg	Diocesan	Co-Ed	\$4000	Yes
<i>St Paul's High School</i>	600	Winnipeg	Religious order	Males only	\$8700	Yes

Saint Boniface Diocesan High School

Saint Boniface Diocesan High School (SBDHS) is the only Catholic high school on the east side of Winnipeg's Red River and is therefore the school most geographically isolated from any of the others. It is also the only one of the schools in the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface, and is governed directly by it. The school is co-educational and had 172

⁵ Winnipeg also has another Catholic jurisdiction: the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Metropolitan Archeparchy of Winnipeg. It encompasses all of Manitoba, overlapping the Latin-rite archdioceses. The Metropolitan Archeparch has authority over all Ukrainian Catholics in Manitoba and therefore has an interest in all of these high schools via Manitoba Catholic Schools (the umbrella organization for all of Catholic schools in the province).

students in grades 9-12 during the 2019-2020 school year (Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 2019).

Saint Mary's Academy

Saint Mary's Academy (SMA) is the oldest continually operating independent high school in Manitoba, Catholic or otherwise. It was founded in 1869 by the Grey Nuns of Montreal and is currently run by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. It is located in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and operates with the Archdiocese's permission, but is managed by the religious order that runs the school. It is a single-sex (females) school, and had 584 students in grades 7-12 (437 in grades 9-12) in the 2019-2020 school year (Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 2019).

Saint Maurice School

Saint Maurice School (SMS) is Manitoba's largest Catholic school by raw numbers of students: it educates students in a co-educational environment from Kindergarten through grade 12. Its high school has 188 students, making it the second smallest of the Catholic high schools (Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). Saint Maurice School is a diocesan parochial school attached to Saint Vital Parish and is governed by the Archdiocese of Winnipeg.

Saint Paul's High School

Saint Paul's High School (SPHS) is a single-sex (male) school located in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. Its enrolment during the 2019-2020 school year was 600 students in grades 9-12 (Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). The school was founded by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1926, but has been run by the Society

of Jesus (Jesuits) since 1933. Since it is operated by a religious order, it operates independent of—but with permission from—the Archdiocese of Winnipeg.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore which parents choose Catholic high schools in Winnipeg, and what reasons they have for making this choice. Employing semi-structured qualitative interviews, the thesis is especially interested in understanding why these parents are choosing Catholic schools in spite of disincentives. In particular, this thesis is interested in the religious, academic, and financial dimensions of Catholic school choice in Winnipeg.

Research Questions

Two main research questions have guided this thesis:

- What are the socioeconomic demographics of parents who choose independent Catholic high schools in Winnipeg? and;
- To what extent are religious, academic, and financial considerations important to parents who choose independent Catholic high schools in Winnipeg?

Significance

Canada's Catholic schools are understudied, and of the few studies done, fewer still have addressed the question of why parents choose them. This study begins to fill a vacuum in existing school choice literature not only for Manitoba, but also for the rest of Canada. It may also have relevance for jurisdictions outside of Canada with similar governance and funding structures, like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Furthermore, this study may lead to an understanding of why parents do not choose to remain in public schools, or choose other independent schools. This is especially interesting since Catholic schools in Manitoba all charge tuition, presenting parents with a significant financial commitment that might make them less appealing and accessible to middle- and low-income families. This thesis may also be of interest to policy makers in government, who may wish to understand why some parents choose to have their children educated outside of the public system and then adjust their programming accordingly. Public schools, too, may be interested in identifying areas in which they can change in order to retain students.

For Catholic schools, this study can provide important information that can make schools more marketable thus ensuring their future viability. Since public schools can offer programming that parents have already paid for through school taxes, and since Catholic schools in Manitoba charge tuition in addition to those taxes, it is important that Catholic schools provide “a viable exit option” (Smith & Meier, 1995, p. 56) (to public schools) or their enrolments will likely decline. Thus, knowing why families choose Catholic schools should help these schools make decisions that will continue to attract students.

Just as every school benefits from understanding what makes it appealing, so too do parents and students. For parents, healthy competition between public and Catholic schools can lead to both becoming better. This may make school choice decisions easier to make. For students, schools may identify gaps in programming that draw students to one school over another, leading schools to improve their own programming. Though

students and parents value different things when making school choice decisions, an overlap in their desires certainly exists.

Conceptual Definitions

Within this thesis, the following definitions apply:

- *Catholic*: relating to any one of the 23 Churches *sui iuris* who are in communion with the Roman Pontiff;
- *independent school*: schools not run by a fully government-funded public school board. Independent schools in Manitoba may be either funded or non-funded (by the government);
- *high school*: in Manitoba, this means grades 9-12;
- *parents*: means biological/adoptive parent(s) or legal guardian(s);
- *school choice*: “schemes that officially and directly give weight to parents’ preferences regarding the allocation of their children to schools” (Brighouse, 2000, pp. 22–23). The Manitoba government’s definition is simpler: “the ability to choose a school to be attended inside or outside of [one’s] home division” (Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 2020). In Canada, school choice schemes vary by province, but can generally include choice of public schools, alternative schools, charter schools, independent schools, homeschooling, online learning, and intra-district school choice (Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016, pp. 11–14). School choice is always constrained by structures both internal and external to the family choosing.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review explores the research on parental choice of both public and independent Catholic schools in Canada. The review also explores the relevant Catholic school choice literature from the United States and Australia, both of which govern Catholic schools in ways similar to Canadian jurisdictions and which can therefore provide useful comparative data.

The research process for this literature review explored a variety of books and journals, mostly discovered through searches of the University of Manitoba's library database. Initial search terms included 'catholic school choice,' 'catholic schools,' 'school choice Canada,' and variations on the same for other relevant countries. For Canadian and Australian sources, a relatively small group of researchers authored a large number of articles, and thus I tended to return to these researchers bibliographies in order to find other relevant sources. There were considerably more articles on Catholic school choice in the United States, and these articles were especially useful in discovering sources for theoretical perspectives. This review sought to use the most recent research, though some of the most relevant research was published as much as 30 years ago.

The first section begins with a brief comparative overview of the governance and funding of Catholic schools in the United States, Australia, and Canada. It then briefly discusses demographics—such as how many children attend Catholic schools in each jurisdiction—to give context to the rest of the literature. In the second section, the review crafts a demographic profile of parents who choose Catholic schools for their children. Section three follows, exploring why these parents choose Catholic schools. In each

section, the literature is divided first by theme and then by country. This organizational pattern is meant to provide a clear distinction between each jurisdiction, respecting their different contexts while allowing comparisons to be drawn among them.

Before the literature review properly begins, a note about source analysis. Lankford and Wyckoff (1992) found that, in spite of Catholic schools being included in nearly all school choice studies, they are often grouped with all non-public alternatives (such as other religious schools, secular independent schools, and charter schools, among others). As such, where necessary, inferences are made about Catholic schools from research that includes them but where Catholic-specific findings are not isolated.

Enrolment, Governance, and Funding of Catholic Schools in the United States, Australia, and Canada⁶

The United States and Australia were chosen as the primary countries for comparison to Canada in this thesis since they have systems of school governance and funding that are similar to those operational in Canada. They also have similar proportions of students in Catholic schools. What follows is a brief description of the nuances of each country's Catholic school systems.

United States

In the 2019-2020 school year, U.S. Catholic schools educated 1.737 million students in 6183 schools, accounting for approximately 30% of independent school enrolments, and about 3.06% of the overall K-12 student population. 80.9% of those

⁶ Despite its many Catholic schools, the United Kingdom was excluded from the literature review because its school governance and funding schemes are so much more numerous and complex that a reasonably analogous comparison with the other systems is difficult.

attending Catholic schools are themselves Catholic. In general, Catholic school enrolment in the United States is declining (National Catholic Educational Association, 2020). It is not entirely clear what factors are causing this decline, although James (2007) suggests changing demographics and values among American Catholic families, increasing tuition (as a result of greater salary expenses that schools incur because of fewer clerical and religious vocations), and a lack of effective leadership may offer some explanation.

In general, the U.S. Catholic Church is free to establish schools, although without recourse to public funds. Traditionally, U.S. Catholic schools were heavily subsidized either by the parish to which they were associated or by the religious order that operated them. As Mass attendance began to decline, parishes and orders found themselves unable to support their schools, leading to increases in tuition, or reliance on other non-traditional funding methods. In the end, the burden of supporting these schools fell to students' families (DeFiore, 2013; James, 2007; Miserandino, 2017). Nowadays, the only form of public funding for U.S. Catholic schools is indirect: some states allow educational vouchers to be used in Catholic schools, and others offer parents various tax incentives that make tuition more sustainable (Miserandino, 2017; O'Keefe, 2003). These programs have led to increased enrolment in some Catholic schools throughout the United States, despite enrolment as a whole continuing to decline (Fleming et al., 2015; Ji & Boyatt, 2007; Lankford & Wyckoff, 1992; Reichard, 2012; Wallace, 1999).

Australia

As of the 2019-2020 school year, there were 1746 Catholic schools in Australia educating approximately 20% of all Australian students (about 764000 pupils), two-thirds of whom were Catholic (National Catholic Education Commission, 2019). Unlike in the

United States, enrolment in Australian Catholic schools has consistently risen since the mid-1980s and is projected to exceed 950000 students by 2025 (Donnelly, 2012; Le & Miller, 2003; National Catholic Education Commission, 2019).⁷

Both the Commonwealth (that is, federal) and state/territorial governments in Australia provide funding to Catholic schools, which are all relatively independent of government control. This funding rests at approximately 70% of the funding required to operate these schools and is based on the cost of educating a student in a government school; parents pay the remainder. By comparison, in public schools, the various governments provide about 95% of the funding required with parents covering the remaining 5%. This represents a difference in funding of about 25% (Donnelly, 2012; National Catholic Education Commission, 2017).

Canada

An account of the enrolment, governance, and funding of Catholic schools in Canada can be found in the previous chapter, but a quick refresher follows here. In Canada, Catholic schools can be either public or independent depending on the province. Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta all maintain fully-funded public Catholic schools (called ‘separate schools’); the territories follow Alberta’s model. Prior to the 1990s, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador had separate schools, but they have since been abolished. All of the other provinces allow Catholic independent schools, although these

⁷ Why Australian Catholic school enrolment is increasing is not entirely clear. Mok and Flynn (2004) found potential effects related to vicarious religion (see chapter three) when asking Catholic school grade 12 students about where they would send their hypothetical children to school: religious affiliation was the primary determinant. Hypothetical choice of Catholic schools also correlated with the students having had a positive classroom experience in Catholic schools themselves (p. 25).

schools receive partial funding only in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec (Allison, 2015; Bosetti et al., 2017).⁸ Canadian Catholic schools (both public and independent) educate approximately 850000 students, the overwhelming majority of whom are in Ontario and Alberta (about 74% and 18%, respectively) (Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association, 2017).⁹

Which Parents Choose Catholic Schools: Demographic Markers

This section will review the research on which parents choose Catholic schools for their children. It is organized thematically according to several of the demographics that Sander and Cohen-Zada (2012) found to be most important in determining parental selection of religious schools. These are (a) parental education, (b) parental religion, and (c) family income (p. 478).

Parental Education

Several studies cite parental education as a factor in selecting schools (Davies & Aurini, 2011; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Ogawa & Dutton, 1997), although only rarely are studies able to explain why exactly parental education matters when choosing Catholic schools specifically. More general studies can provide clues. For instance, a study by Chesters (2015) indicated that Australian grade 12 students from families with lower levels of parental educational attainment are more likely to enter vocational training after high school and are less likely to be admitted to university. It is possible

⁸ Alberta and Saskatchewan both also have independent Catholic schools, but these are less common in those provinces since they have publicly-funded Catholic schools.

⁹ It is difficult to determine an exact proportion of Canadian students who are enrolled in Catholic schools. 92% of Catholic school students are in publicly funded Catholic schools in Alberta and Ontario, and Statistics Canada does not separate secular public schools from Catholic ones in their data. In any case, Catholic schools represent around 20% of Canada's K-12 enrolment.

that this explains the propensity for more highly educated parents to choose independent schools (which are often religious and frequently Catholic) since they tend to emphasize academic programs over vocational ones (Buddin et al., 1998; Ogawa & Dutton, 1994). Moreover, parents with university educations are more likely to select schools that prepare their children for the same type of education that they received, and Catholic schools tend to emphasize traditional academics (Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Hoffer et al., 1985).

United States. In the United States, parents with higher levels of formal education are more likely to choose their children's schools, especially independent ones (Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Ogawa & Dutton, 1997). A study of parental choice of independent schools in California found that choice of independent schools positively correlated with parental education. The same study indicated that being Catholic is the most significant demographic factor among students in independent schools (Buddin et al., 1998). Considering Catholic schools are all independent in the United States (and further considering that Catholic independent schools make up 41.3% of all independent schools in the U.S., more than any other group (Council for American Private Education, 2014)), this suggests that more highly educated parents are, by extension, more likely to be choosing Catholic schools. Similarly, Yang and Kayaardi (2004) found that parents in Missouri that send their children to religious schools generally have more formal education than parents whose children are in public school. Their study suggests that one reason well-educated parents choose religious schools for their children is because "parents with higher educational attainment better understand the importance of

education, what different kinds of schools offer and what they want their children to acquire, and therefore are in a better position to make an informed decision” (p. 223).

Australia. As in the United States, parental education has been identified as a factor in choosing Catholic schools in Australia. Parental educational attainment positively correlates with selection of Catholic schools, although this is “more pronounced” for selection of independent schools (most of which are secular) (Dearden et al., 2011, p. 309; Kelley & Evans, 2004; Le & Miller, 2003; Neal, 1997; Vella, 1999). Although higher levels of educational attainment have limited positive correlation with choice of Catholic schools, generational educational effects overwhelmingly correlate: the majority of students enrolled in Australia’s Catholic schools have parents who went to Catholic schools as well (Graetz, 1990). Indeed, Dearden et al. (2011) note that if both parents went to Catholic schools themselves, their children were 20% more likely to attend Catholic schools than children whose parents went to government schools, irrespective of the parents’ religious affiliation.

Canada. As with other countries, Canadian parents with more education are more active in choosing their children’s schools (Bosetti, 2004). Parents with more formal education are also more likely to check a school’s performance indicators when deciding on a school. And, despite the general correlation between high levels of education and high incomes, more educated parents are still more likely to choose among different schools, even within the free, public system. On the other end of the spectrum, parents with less formal education tend to be more in favour of school choice, despite being less able to actually choose where their children are schooled (often because they have lower

incomes). It is possible that this is because these parents feel that the public system is not effectively serving their children (Davies & Aurini, 2011).

Curiously, in the same study, Davies and Aurini (2011) indicate that parents who are in favour of greater choice and accountability (that is, schools reporting their results on a variety of indicators) tend to have less formal education. The authors later note that these “pro-accountability” (p. 469) parents are more likely to choose religious schools for their children, but lower-income families are *less* likely to do so despite being more likely to be pro-accountability and more likely to have less formal education than parents in higher socioeconomic brackets. So, parents who choose religious schools for their children appear to occupy a unique place in the Canadian literature. One possible reason for this may be that Davies and Aurini’s (2011) study does not account for provincial and territorial variations in how parents are able to exercise choice options, which have an enormous effect on parents’ abilities to choose.

Parental Religion

Perhaps rather obviously, parental religion is another commonly cited factor for parents selecting a religious school, particularly among Catholics and other traditionally conservative Christian denominations (Ajuwon & Bradshaw, 2009; Anderson, 1988; Cohen-Zada & Sander, 2008; Ji & Boyatt, 2007; Kelley & Evans, 2004; Le & Miller, 2003; Long & Toma, 1988; Moe, 2001; Sander, 2005a; Sander & Cohen-Zada, 2012; Vella, 1999; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). Generally, being Catholic correlates positively with selecting Catholic schools for one’s children, and more so than for parents of other denominations (Sander, 2005b). That said, Lankford and Wyckoff (1992) note that few

studies have been done on parental religion as a school choice consideration, despite nearly all school choice research including religious schools.

United States. Menashi (2002) notes that 85% of parents who choose independent schools in the United States pick religious ones. Of these schools, most are Catholic (Hoxby, 1998; National Catholic Educational Association, 2019), suggesting that parental religion is likely a significant consideration. For instance, in their study of independent school choice in the United States, Yang and Kayaardi (2004) found that parents who identify as Christian are 2.4 times more likely to choose religious schools for their children than non-Christians. Consistent with Yang and Kayaardi (2004), Prichard and Swezey (2016) found that, among Christian parents, religion was a more important school choice factor for those that either homeschooled their children or sent them to independent Christian schools. Ajuwon and Bradshaw (2009) found similar results. They noted that religion was the most important consideration when choosing a school after academic performance and cost (which were tied). Finally, Sander and Cohen-Zada (2012) found that American parents who attend religious services at least once a week are 28% more likely to send their children to religious schools than those who never attend services. Frequent churchgoers were also more likely to discuss schools, suggesting a greater depth of interest in school choice (Schneider et al., 1997).

Among Catholics more specifically, Long and Toma (1988) found that Catholic households were more likely to select independent schools for their children, of which (the authors note) Catholic parochial schools comprise the highest percentage. Similarly, Sander (2005a) found that “parents’ church attendance has a large effect on the demand for Catholic schooling: more religious Catholics as indicated by their church attendance

are substantially more likely to send their children to Catholic schools” (p. 259). Sander’s (2005a) study is especially significant since it controls not only for self-identification as Catholic (which is a common—but inaccurate—proxy for Catholic religiosity in most other studies that correlate Catholic school attendance with parental catholicity), but looks especially at those who actively practice their faith rather than only passively or culturally identifying with it (as measured by church attendance). As a result, Sander’s (2005a) study is fairly consistent with an earlier study of parental religiosity in school choice (Greeley & Rossi, 1966). This suggests that declining enrolment in U.S. Catholic schools over the last half-century correlates directly with declining religiosity (and increasing passive identification) among American Catholics. This is supported by Cohen-Zada and Sander (2008) who found that U.S. Catholics who attend Mass at least once a week were considerably more likely to send their children to Catholic schools than non-practicing Catholics (although they note that even non-practicing Catholics are more likely to send their children to Catholic schools). All of these studies suggest that being Catholic correlates positively with enrolling one’s children in U.S. Catholic schools.

Australia. Parental religious affiliation in school choice is not a factor unique to North America. One study of Australian parents found that parental religion (especially that of the mother) corresponded with “a strong tradition across at least three generations connecting Catholic families with Catholic schools...” (Anderson, 1988, p. 362). In fact, Anderson (1988) found that 76% of students whose mothers were Catholic attended Catholic schools, meaning that 95% of students in Australian Catholic schools have Catholic mothers (Anderson, 1988, p. 362). Despite Anderson’s study being nearly 30 years old, his results have mostly been confirmed by contemporary research.

For instance, a comprehensive study of Australian data revealed that two-thirds of students in Catholic schools in Australia come from Catholic families, with a large majority of the remainder coming from other Christian denominations (Kelley & Evans, 2004). An even more recent comparative study of Australian and British independent school choice found, among Australian parents, “substantial religious effects on school choice, particularly in relation to parental Catholic identification. If at least one parent identified with the Catholic religion, the probability of their child attending a Catholic school increased by 16 percentage points...” (Dearden et al., 2011, p. 318). Kelley and Evans (2004) found an even larger result, suggesting that students from Catholic families are 45% more likely to attend Catholic schools. This trend may continue: when Mok and Flynn (2004) asked grade 12 students where they intended to send their own future children, they found that—even among this relatively young demographic—religious denomination was the most important consideration in their hypothetical future choices. This data all suggests that parental religion is a significant factor in Catholic school choice in Australia.

Canada. It is unclear how much parental religion plays a role for Canadian parents when selecting Catholic schools, as there appear to be no studies that directly consider this question. However, inferences can be drawn from other studies of school choice in Canada.

Davies and Aurini (2011) note that “parents who valued religious education chose religious public and [independent] schools” (p. 472). Although this does not directly speak to parental religion as a motivating factor in school choice, it can be logically inferred that parents who value religious education are more likely to be religious

themselves. However, although their study included Catholic parents, they do not separate the number of Catholics from the entire pool of religious parents. So, the percentage of Catholic parents motivated in this way is unclear.

Similarly, Bosetti's (2004) study of how parents choose elementary schools in Alberta appears to confirm the fairly self-evident notion that Canadian parents who value religious education are likely to be religious themselves. It found that nearly 10% of parents who have children in independent religious schools said that religious instruction was their primary reason for choosing the school. Again, this suggests that these parents are likely religious themselves. Unfortunately, since Bosetti's (2004) study evaluated independent school choice in Alberta, those 10% likely include few Catholics (who enjoy a publicly-funded separate school board in Alberta). Nevertheless, both of these studies are instructive in their suggestion that parental religion matters, even if the percentage of Catholic parents in their data is difficult to ascertain.

Among parents who chose independent schools in Manitoba, Janzen (2002) found that parents who sent their children to Catholic schools found religious instruction inadequate in the public system, possibly indicating that parental religion is a factor in their choice. This is especially probable since these same Catholic school parents "did not appear to have significantly negative opinions of public schools" (p. 44) in any other areas, thus further suggesting a primarily religious motivation. Janzen's data suffers from limitations though, as it includes only four independent schools, just one of which is Catholic. In any case, despite studies suggesting that parental religion is likely a consideration in choice of Catholic schools in Canada, this can only be inferred; there appear to be no studies have found this to be conclusively true.

Family Income

Family income is one socioeconomic determinant that would seem to be an obvious factor for parents selecting Catholic schools, especially because many of these schools charge tuition.

United States. In the United States, research tends to find that choice of a religious school often correlates to higher parental income (Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). Indeed, Reichard (2012) found that there was no statistically significant difference between the religious motivations of American parents that have to pay full tuition or who have vouchers, suggesting that more parents would likely choose independent religious schools for their children if cost were no obstacle.

Buddin et al. (1998) found that enrolment in independent schools in California increases among families with greater household income. In their data, 80% of respondents who chose independent schools chose parochial (religious) ones, of which the majority were Catholic. This suggests a link between higher family income and selection of Catholic schools.

These studies' findings were confirmed in a 2017 Gallup poll that found that high family income was a good indicator that a family's children would be enrolled in independent schools. The same poll found that about 16% of these enrolments were in Catholic schools. These parents also tended to be older and with postgraduate educations (Jones, 2017).

Australia. The assumption that family income is a determinant in religious school choice is not always supported in research. In Australia, where independent and Catholic schools charge tuition and where their enrolments are nevertheless quite high, Kelley and

Evans (2004) expected that both independent and Catholic schools must logically be filled with students from families with the highest household incomes, and that government schools must have disproportionately high numbers of lower income students. However, they found that “about 60 per cent of students in all three sectors [government, independent, and Catholic] come from the middle [three] quintiles of the parental income distribution” (p. 8). On the extremes of the income spectrum, they found that about 18% of students in free, government schools came from the highest family income bracket, whereas nearly 10% of students in independent schools were from the lowest. Catholic schools fell nearly in the middle of these statistics. This suggests fairly egalitarian access to school choice options for Australian families irrespective of family income. This is especially true when determining selection of Catholic schools: “[o]f the social class measures...investigated, neither father’s occupational status, nor family income...has a significant effect on going to Catholic school. [...]. Indeed, family income is entirely irrelevant to decisions about Catholic school” (Kelley & Evans, 2004, pp. 11, 14). Dearden et al. (2011) suggest that the insignificance of family income is probably due to Catholic school fees being significantly lower than those at independent schools, making enrolling in a Catholic school much easier.

Conversely, however, an earlier Australian study found a high correlation between family income and attendance at Catholic schools (Le & Miller, 2003). Two possible explanations may explain this dichotomy. First, Kelley and Evans (2004) were evaluating a smaller and somewhat more recent range of data (1982-2002). Le and Miller (2003) were evaluating enrolment data that overlaps somewhat with Kelley and Evans’s (2004), but which is generally older. Furthermore, Le and Miller (2003) had to estimate

the number of Catholic parents in their data pool, extrapolating from worldwide statistics and using old, 1911 Australian census data. Although Le and Miller (2003) proceeded from considered estimates, this might explain some of the disparity in both studies' findings.

Canada. Canadian research suggests that independent school choice is correlated to higher family incomes, but not necessarily choice of Catholic schools. This may be because of regional variations in Canada regarding funding for different types of schools. For instance, in Alberta, a study by Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) found that among families with children in religious independent schools, 7% reported incomes below \$30000, and 14% reported incomes above \$150000. This is compared with independent schools more generally, which saw 44% of parents reporting incomes over \$150000 (p. 97). It is unclear why this dichotomy exists, but it may be because religious schools are generally more affordable (Lankford & Wyckoff, 1992).

Although it might seem that the difference between the percentage of high-income parents in religious and secular independent schools (30% more families in the \$150000 income range) suggests that religion is not a strong consideration for school choice in Alberta, it is important to note that most religious schools in Alberta are public Catholic schools whose parents' religious preferences are not included in the data. Moreover, since Albertan Catholic schools are nearly all fully-funded, this may serve to explain the 30% difference between family income in these cases, since a large

demographic of religious school choosers (in this case, choosers of Catholic schools) are not included in the data.¹⁰

Davies and Aurini (2011) studied demographics of parental school choice motivations on a national scale in Canada. In general, they found that wealthier Canadian families are better able to choose schools. Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) agree, suggesting that the ability to choose schools is most common to families in the middle and upper classes. That said, in an earlier study, Bosetti (2004) found that both high (26% over \$100000) and low (29% under \$50000) income families choose independent schools, suggesting “that children from both ends of the income distribution attend [independent] schools” (p. 391). However, this relatively equal distribution of income disappears when religion is factored in: 36% of families in religious independent schools had incomes below \$50000, whereas 7% of families in secular independent schools reported the same. Extrapolating from Bosetti’s (2004) numbers, religious families are likely then to either be materially poorer, or religious schools must generally charge lower tuitions (thereby attracting lower-income families). But perhaps the simplest explanation is the most plausible: the majority of religious schools in Alberta are in the fully-funded Catholic system, and therefore are not included in Bosetti’s (2004) data.

Bosetti’s (2004) study also looked only at elementary schools in Alberta. Across Canada, Davies and Aurini (2011) found that families with lower-incomes were less likely to enrol their children in religious schools, regardless of whether they were independent or public. The authors suggested that this was surprising, considering public

¹⁰ I suspect that in provinces where Catholic schools are all (or nearly all) independent, the 30% gulf would be considerably narrower.

religious schools (of which the significant majority are Catholic) do not charge tuition. However, public Catholic schools exist only in three provinces representing 53% of Canada's population. Of the other 47% of the population, 40% (in B.C., Manitoba, and Quebec) have access only to partial funding when choosing religious schools (Statistics Canada, 2016b). The remaining 7% have access to no funding at all. Suddenly, this statistic seems less surprising.

Why Parents Choose Catholic Schools: Practical Considerations

Literature suggests that parents choose to have their children educated outside of the secular public system for a number of different reasons. As a result, practical reasons for school choice decisions—those things that parents look for in schools—differ across the country and are especially unique for Catholic schools.

In Ontario, Card, Dooley, and Payne (2008) note that non-Catholic families must (in most cases) send their children to a secular public school or to a tuition-charging independent school. Conversely, Catholic families have the option to enrol their children in either the secular or Catholic public systems or independent schools, thus increasing their options for choice. When making this decision, Ontarian Catholic families consider “the strength of their preferences for a Catholic versus a secular education, the quality of the schools in their neighborhood [*sic*], and the distance from their homes to schools in the two systems” (p. 2).

Alberta's system is similar to Ontario's in that there are publicly-funded secular and Catholic school systems. In her study of parental choice of elementary schools in Alberta, Bosetti (2004) found that parents look for different factors depending on the school system in which they want to enrol their children. Nevertheless, most groups of

parents shared consensus in a few areas: common values, high academic achievement, and location. Interestingly, Bosetti (2004) also notes that “47% of public school parent[s] send their children to designated school[s] without seeking information,” suggesting that school location is the primary choice factor for parents of children in public schools (p. 397). Because most Catholic schools in Alberta are distributed broadly throughout the province, location is likely less of a consideration than for parents in other provinces.¹¹ For the same reason, tuition is also not a major consideration for Catholic school parents in jurisdictions where these schools are publicly funded.

Although there are surely myriad other considerations that parents make when selecting schools, this section will briefly explore current literature on three areas that commonly recur. These are (a) quality of education and student achievement, (b) religious instruction, and (c) affordability, all of which Ajuwon and Bradshaw (2009) identified as the top three considerations among religious parents when choosing a school.

Quality of Education and Student Achievement

Previous studies have found that one of the most common reasons that parents and students choose schools outside the secular public system is because of the perception of poor academic achievement and/or standards in the public system or, at least, better academic success for students elsewhere (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007). Numerous studies indicate that parents are concerned that good post-secondary credentials are becoming increasingly important in their children’s future successes. Schools with good

¹¹ This is probably true in Ontario and Saskatchewan as well, given the similarity in their separate school systems.

academic results are seen as ensuring that students are more successful in securing these credentials after high school (Bosetti, 2004; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Taylor & Mackay, 2008).

There is a perception that Catholic schools are especially good at ensuring student academic success, and for a variety of reasons (Guzmán et al., 2012; Kelley & Evans, 2004). These ‘Catholic School Effects,’ (CSEs) are defined as “the higher educational outcomes of Catholic school students compared with their [independent] school peers, whether that be higher academic achievement or [university] attendance” (Berends, 2015). The following section will explore the research regarding how academic quality affects parental choice of Catholic schools.

United States. There is little research that directly studies whether or not academic achievement is a significant consideration for parents choosing Catholic schools in the United States. This lack of research is surprising, given that Frabutt, Holter, and Nuzzi (2013) found that research on academic CSEs formed the single largest sector of all research on Catholic schools between 2005 and 2010 (approximately 18%) (p. 80). However, it is possible that this gap in the research is attributable to the fact that generally, academic criteria are the most important for all parents when selecting non-public schools (Catholic independent, secular independent, or charter) (Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Kleitz et al., 2000; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). As a result, the plurality of studies regarding CSEs in the United States usually attempt to either verify or

challenge the existence of CSEs, taking for granted that academic considerations hold primacy of place for parents choosing Catholic schools.¹²

That being said, Lankford and Wyckoff (1992) do note that independent school parents are generally more concerned with academic standards than their public school counterparts. Of this group, they found that Catholic school parents were more concerned about academic performance than other groups of religious school parents (p. 319). Long and Toma (1988) found, too, that academic performance was a consideration in sending one's children to Catholic schools, though they found this to be the case for all schools studied. Ji and Boyatt (2007) found that Catholic parents' support for voucher programs for independent schools tends first to do with religion, academic considerations being secondary. Finally, Guzmán, Palacios, and Deliyannides (2012) found that, among Latinx, there was a recurring belief that Catholic schools had better academic standards than non-Catholic schools. However, they did not specifically link this perception to choice of a Catholic school.

Australia. Though studies exist about CSEs in Australia, few studies indicate that Australian parents are choosing Catholic schools specifically for academic benefits. Daniel, Wang, Murray, and Harrison (2017) analyzed data from the Longitudinal Study of Australia Data as it relates to school choice. It indicated that parents who select Catholic schools are nearly 50% more likely to choose a school for “an aspect of the

¹² Whether or not CSEs exist in U.S. Catholic schools is the subject of considerable debate, but is beyond the scope of this study. See: Altonji, Elder, and Taber (2005); Bryk, Holland, and Lee (1993); Carbonaro (2006); Carbonaro and Covay (2010); Freeman and Berends (2016); Hallinan and Kubitschek (2010); Goldberger and Cain (1982); Hoffer (1997); Hoffer, Greeley, and Coleman (1985); Jeynes (2014); Neal (1997); Reardon, Cheadle, and Robinson (2009); and Willms (1985), among countless others.

school” (p. 135), a category which includes academic performance and religious affiliation. The authors note that this data set does not disaggregate any of the characteristics in this category, so it is difficult to determine the exact interest that Australian Catholic school parents have in academic achievement as a selection criterion.

Canada. If there are few studies directly linking academic achievement to the choice of Catholic schools in the United States, there are virtually none for Canada. A study of grades three to six test scores between secular and Catholic public schools in Ontario found minor improvements in test scores of students in both sectors when competition between these sectors was greatest. It also suggested that parents are interested in choosing schools in order to access better schools. However, the study suggests that competition between the two sectors is the key indicator of higher tests scores; the Catholic nature of the schools themselves did not appear to be a significant aspect of that success except insofar as students of major religions (Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, for instance) are generally more academically successful than irreligious ones, and there are likely more of these in Catholic schools (Card et al., 2010; Lehrer, 2010). In general, all parents tend to consider academic achievement to be a consideration in school choice decisions.

Religious Instruction

As discussed earlier in this review, research has found that parental religion is a considerable demographic marker of parents who send their children to Catholic schools. It is no great surprise then that religious instruction—both formal classroom instruction, but also a school’s religious atmosphere—is a significant consideration for these same parents when deciding to send their children to Catholic schools. Moreover, some

research suggests that attending Catholic school has a positive influence on students remaining Catholic as adults and correlates positively with Mass attendance later in life (Perl & Gray, 2007).

United States. One of the primary reasons that Catholics send their children to Catholic schools is because of the religious education students receive. Cohen-Zada and Justman (2012) suggest that

parents recognize the dual function of schools in shaping a child's religious identity and preparing the child for employment in the workplace. They recognize that the religious affiliation of the school will influence the child's future religious orientation, and seek to minimize the expected religious friction between themselves and their children, while taking into account each school's general quality. (p. 951)

This suggests that religious parents account religious education almost equally with strong academics when choosing a school, a finding confirmed by Ji and Boyatt (2007), who interpret Moe's (2001) data to suggest that "the teaching of religious and moral values seems to be at the heart of [Catholic parents'] support for school vouchers in addition to academic and economic reasons" (p. 153). However, Lankford and Wyckoff (1992) suggest that Catholic parents are slightly more likely to select academic standards as a choice consideration than other religious parents suggesting that for Catholic families religious education may be marginally less of a consideration than for other religious parents.

Similar correlations between parental religion and religious instruction were found among Latinx Catholics in the United States. Guzmán, Palacios, and Deliyannides

(2012) found that many considered religious instruction to be an important factor in their opinion and selection of Catholic schools. More generally, Latinx parents believed that Catholic schools taught a higher standard of morality and offered greater discipline, both of which they found important and both of which they often linked to religious education. Reichard (2012) notes that parental school choice in the U.S. strongly suggests that “moral, ethical, and religious instruction consistent with family values” is an important consideration for parents who choose religious schools (p. 469). This seems accurate, since 90% of Americans who choose independent schools pick religious ones, the majority of which are Catholic (Hoxby, 1998, p. 50).

Australia. Australian data does not always indicate whether or not parents send their children to Catholic schools for religious education or for other reasons (Daniel et al., 2017). Flynn and Mok (2002) found that when Australian parents and students were required to rank their reasons for attending Catholic school, religious considerations were consistently placed either near the bottom of the list or dead last (cited in Rymarz, 2013). Rymarz (2013) goes on to suggest that this variation between the numbers of Catholics in Australian Catholic schools and the fact that religious considerations rank uniformly low as a choice consideration may be due to a theory called vicarious religion (Davie, 2007), where

religious affiliation acts as a metaphorical safety net. Its main purpose is to help people in difficult times but it is not an active or formative influence. [...]. Like all safety nets, it is not designed or supposed to be used too often but it gives a sense of reassurance and if removed would make life more uncertain and anxious. [...]. Vicarious religion...offers an explanation for the continued popularity of

Catholic schools. Catholic schools are, perhaps, the most tangible part of the general religious memory. For an interlude of years they provide a daily point of contact between the Church, once or twice removed, and the individual. (p. 180-181)

Rymarz's (2013) hypothesis seems to have been confirmed in the earlier research of Kelley and Evans (2004), who found that even nominal Catholics (that is, Catholics who rarely attend Mass) are more likely to send their children to Catholic schools. Nevertheless, they found that the more devout the parents, the higher the likelihood that their children would attend Australian Catholic schools (p. 13).

Canada. Despite the similarities between the Australian and Canadian Catholic school systems, it appears that Canadian parents do value religious and moral formation as an important consideration when choosing Catholic schools. Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) found that "developing strong moral character" was second only to academic achievement for Alberta independent religious school parents (p. 103). Similarly, Friesen (1998) found that Manitoban parents who move their children from public to independent schools all agree that development of morals was a significant consideration in deciding to change schools. This was later confirmed by Janzen (2002), who found that 85% of parents enrolling their children in independent schools found that religious instruction was insufficient in the public system. Moreover,

the two questionnaire statements that elicited the most extreme responses were about religious instruction. Parents unanimously 'strongly disagreed' that "public schools provide adequate religious instruction." Alternately, parents unanimously

‘strongly agreed’ that “religious instruction is an important part of the curriculum” of their chosen school. (p. 43)

In the same study, Janzen (2002) noted that 97% of Catholic school parents in Manitoba found religious instruction to be sufficient in their school of choice. Furthermore, these parents considered religion more important than academic standards when selecting a school for their children. This degree of importance increased after the secular independent school parents’ statistics were excluded. This appears to suggest that religious instruction is not only an important consideration for Manitoban families when choosing a school, but *the* most important consideration (p. 45).

Affordability

Historically, cost was not a major factor in parental choice of Catholic schools. Mostly, this was because high numbers of churchgoing Catholics supported parish schools by way of collections at Mass. Moreover, in the 1950s, nearly 90% of teaching staff in Catholic schools were clergy or religious, most of whom were paid little due to their vows of poverty. But with declining Mass attendance and fewer vocations over the last half-century, Catholic schools have needed to re-evaluate their financial positions: most independent Catholic schools now charge some form of tuition to cover lost parish revenues and the greater cost of hiring laity for teaching roles. This is true even of schools that are partially supported by the government (like in Australia and some Canadian provinces) (Harris, 1995; James, 2007; Wallace, 1999). Nowadays, affordability has become a more serious consideration for many parents who wish to send their children to Catholic schools (DeFiore, 2013; Miserandino, 2017).

United States. Harris (1995) notes that “[w]hile the aim of [U.S. Catholic schools] is not to make a profit but to provide a good education, when the cost of doing so keeps going up...tuition prices are bound to rise. This forces some of those who would like their children to attend such schools to stop ‘buying the product’” (p. 20).

Confirmation of this may be found in certain U.S. states where the introduction of voucher programs increased the number of students enrolling in Catholic schools. This suggests (albeit indirectly) that affordability is a concern for Catholic school parents (Wallace, 1999). Lankford and Wyckoff (1992) found this correlation empirically, noting that tuition increases and religious school enrolments are inversely correlated. They also found that lower-income, inner-city families in the U.S. will often choose Catholic schools because their tuitions are relatively low (compared to other independent schools). Furthermore, Wallace (1999) suggests that attrition from Catholic schools to good public schools is because parents are no longer willing to pay for Catholic schools given their own positive experiences attending public schools. Thus, this suggests that the increasing costs of tuitions have a significant generational effect on Catholic school enrolment.

In a study of how parent religiosity affects choices of religious schools, Reichard (2012) found that “[i]f tuition is removed as a barrier to entry [into religious schools], religious parents may prefer religious [independent] schools for their children” (p. 478). Accordingly, Reichard (2012) suggests expanding voucher programs such that parental religion is not ‘priced out’ as a factor in school choice decisions. Similarly, Ji and Boyatt (2007) found that Catholics tend to be quite supportive of voucher programs, mostly for religious reasons. This is confirmed by Fleming, Cowen, Witte, and Wolf (2015) who found that Catholics were “much more likely to be voucher users” (p. 800).

These findings are interesting since most research indicates that parents with higher incomes are more likely to choose Catholic schools for their children (see the earlier part of this review for that literature). This is because these parents can afford tuition, and so affordability tends not to be a concern for most of these families. However, Yang and Kayaardi (2004) note that one explanation for this phenomena could be that, while vouchers make independent religious schools more affordable, they still leave secular independent schools out of reach for many families. Ultimately, this means that some parents are choosing Catholic schools as cost-effective alternatives to other independent schooling options. Furthermore, there tends to be a perception among Latinx parents that Catholic schools are unaffordable, suggesting that affordability may matter to some ethnic groups more than others (Guzmán et al., 2012). Ultimately, affordability matters to some parents when choosing Catholic schools, but may be unimportant to others.

Australia. The Australian Catholic school system faced many of the same problems as in the U.S., with declines in Mass attendance and a shortage of clergy and religious leading to increases in overall costs and, subsequently, a decline in general affordability (Canavan, 2009). Affordability is such a concern for Australian Catholic schools that the Archdiocese of Sydney mandated that its parishes provide scholarships to children who want to attend Catholic schools but are financially unable to do so (Canavan, 2009). That being said, Dearden et al. (2011) found that attendance at non-government schools in Australia is associated with higher incomes, suggesting that affordability matters primarily for those with lower incomes (as might be expected). But, they also found affordability was likely a consideration in selecting Catholic schools

despite the lack of a direct correlation in the data. Kelley and Evans (2004) note that, despite there being extra costs associated with attending Catholic schools, these tend to be reduced if families can demonstrate financial need. Moreover, these fees are generally modest to begin with, given the heavy subsidization of Catholic schools by the Commonwealth and State governments. It is clear that Catholic schools attempt to make themselves as affordable as possible in order to attract students from government schools.

Canada. In Canada, Catholic school affordability varies considerably by province. For instance, in Ontario's publicly-funded Catholic schools, Davies (2013) notes that the lack of tuition fees is one fewer barrier for families when deciding to switch between public and Catholic sectors, removing affordability as a consideration for these parents. One expects the same to be true for selection of public Catholic schools in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

But the same may not be true for parents with children in independent Catholic schools. In a study of parental choice of independent schools in Alberta, Bosetti (2004) found that religious independent schools tend to have lower tuitions than secular independent schools (a finding also supported by Pizarro Milian and Davies (2017)), and some families are attracted to them since they provide a more cost-effective alternative to public schooling than secular independent schools. This also suggests that independent religious schools recognize the need to remain affordable in order to attract students. However, Bosetti's (2004) study is limited to Alberta, and there are few independent Catholic schools in the province. This makes it difficult to extrapolate an exclusively Catholic parental position. But, Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) asked parents in Edmonton and Calgary where they would send their children if tuition were no obstacle. In response,

47% of public school parents (including public Catholic school parents) indicated that they would move their children into independent schools, indicating that affordability is a relatively important factor in these parents' school choice decisions (though not one exclusive to Catholic school parents).

Conclusion

This review indicates that although Catholic schools are common throughout much of Canada, little specific research has been done about why Canadian parents choose Catholic schools for their children. Certainly Catholic schools have factored into the broader picture of Canadian school choice literature, but for the most part they have been studied as parts of the greater whole. Studies of Canadian Catholic schools are generally focused on Ontario or Alberta, which has the two largest public Catholic school systems in Canada. Only rarely have these studies focused on Catholic school choice, and even if they have, their findings are of limited application elsewhere in Canada because of the considerable differences in Catholic school governance and funding across the country. Moreover, research for Manitoba is virtually non-existent. And, where this research does exist, it is vague (often focusing generally on independent schools rather than specifically on Catholic ones) and weak (old, and with small data pools). This makes it nearly impossible to gauge why Manitoban parents choose Catholic schools, thereby affirming the need for this study. In the next two chapters, I will discuss my theoretical framework and methodology for researching why parents choose Catholic schools in Manitoba.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

There are a variety of theories that commonly underpin school choice research and which emerge implicitly throughout the literature. For instance, it is clear that many parents try to select schools that maximize the benefits that their children receive, while also mitigating drawbacks (like high tuitions). Moreover, Catholic school parents are not always selecting schools for exclusively religious reasons, either. This suggests that Catholic schools are providing secular benefits that appeal to families, Catholic or otherwise. Perhaps most curiously, even non-practicing Catholics tend to send their children to Catholic schools. Because each of these phenomena have been observed in previous research, it is important to consider the theoretical bases that underpin them so as to capture the underlying rationales behind participant responses. Thus, this section will discuss three social theories that may be applicable to Catholic school choice as it has been explored in previous literature. The theories will be presented in discussion with Bourdieu's (1984) theory of *habitus* which is applicable more broadly to sociological research and which provides a theoretical basis outside of school choice- or religion-specific theories.

So what theories are applicable to Catholic school choice? Green (2018) reviewed a variety of articles regarding the intersection of religion and school choice. Her interest was in the theoretical frameworks underpinning the research. She found that two theories predominate parental choice of religious schools: social identity theory and secular goods theory. These are instructive to this thesis since the first implies that choice of Catholic schools is for the reproduction of religious capital and the second explains why non-Catholics would choose Catholic schools while further theorizing other reasons (beyond

religious ones) that Catholics choose Catholic schools. Rymarz (2013) has suggested a third theory: Davie's (2007) theory of vicarious religion. It may help explain why non-practicing Catholics continue to send their children to Catholic schools. Although these theories are specific to religion and school choice, behind them lies Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, an central sociological theory which helps explain group social behaviour.

Bourdieu's *Habitus*

Glaesser and Cooper (2014) define Bourdieu's *habitus* as "a system of lasting dispositions acquired through past experiences [that] vary systematically between individuals from different social classes" (p. 465). To understand *habitus*, one must also understand that Bourdieu (1984) had a very specific definition of 'social class':

Social class is not defined by a property (not even the most determinant one, such as the volume and composition of capital) nor by a collection of properties (of sex, age, social origin, ethnic origin—proportion of blacks and white, for examples, or natives and immigrants—income, education level, etc.), nor even by a chain of properties strung out from a fundamental property (position in the relations of production) in relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned; but by the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices. (p. 105)

Though Riley (2017) suggests that Bourdieu's (1984) definition is so convoluted that it is difficult to use effectively, the definition does suggest that social class is formed by a relationship among numerous properties, all of which affect an individual's behaviour. Thus, Glaesser and Cooper (2014) suggest that "a course of action [affected by *habitus*]

is not merely chosen according to how likely it is to lead to some outcome, but also by the subjective estimation of the likelihood of success” (p. 465). Such subjective estimations are borne of one’s social class which is not something that one can necessarily affect or control.

In short, Bourdieu’s *habitus* theory suggests that human behaviour cannot be minimized to the sum of rational choices, but is affected by a diverse variety of other circumstances and experiences that either enable or constrain individuals’ behaviours and choices, especially social class. Therefore, *habitus* provides an instructive general sociological background for school choice.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is a relatively novel aggregate of several pre-existing theories and can be traced to the work of Pelz and den Dulk (2018). They identify social identity theory “as a vehicle for parents to pursue their religious distinctiveness by selecting a[n independent] school that transmits their belief system” (p. 80). The theory draws heavily on the notion of cultural transmission: the ways by which culture is transmitted from person to person. Describing the transmission of religion, Iannaccone (1990) suggested that “[r]eligious capital is both a prerequisite for and a consequence of most religious activity” (p. 299). His study found that

[r]eligious mobility becomes progressively less likely as people age. [...]. People switch denominations in ways that preserve the value of their religious human capital. Rates of intergenerational mobility tend to be low, particularly for people reared in distinctive religious traditions, and the switching that does occur tends to be among similar denominations. Religious intermarriage displays similar

patterns: People seek out partners whose religious human capital complements their own, and the productive efficiency inherent in shared-faith marriages leads to higher levels of church attendance and contributions. Religious upbringing, probably the most important source of human religious capital, is a major determinant of religious belief and behavior. (p. 313)

This suggests that the earlier in life that religious capital is transmitted, the more likely it is to actually matter as one ages. Thus, schools are the ideal places in which religious capital can be reproduced.

In a study of how religious values are transmitted through education, Cohen-Zada and Elder (2018) extend Iannaccone's (1990) findings to religious schools, suggesting that "parents derive utility from passing their religious beliefs on to their children" (p. 325). Indeed, insofar as religious socialization is a concern for parents, Cohen-Zada and Elder (2018) found that "on average, preserving religious identity is much less important for Mainline Protestants than for Catholics and Evangelical Protestants" (p. 326).¹³ Since previous research suggests that religious reasons are important factors for choice of Catholic schools, it stands to reason that parents intend to transmit religion to their children through school choice decisions, reproducing religious capital as they do so and thereby enhancing their own social standing.

¹³ Interestingly, the same study implies that a student's likelihood of attending a religious school ought to decrease as the student's religious denomination grows. This is because there would be less competition for religious adherents from other religions, coupled with broader societal support for the religion. Religious schools would thus be less necessary for attaining religious capital. Indeed, their study discovered that "the fraction of Catholics who attend Catholic schools is inversely related to the share of Catholics in the population" (Cohen-Zada & Elder, 2018).

Bourdieu's *habitus* suggests that agents' behaviours can be influenced by social and spatial structures and practices (Glaesser & Cooper, 2014; Yoon & Gulson, 2010; Yoon & Lubienksi, 2017). Bourdieu's specifically addresses the notion of religious *habitus*, which Rey (2004) defines as "the specifically religious dimension of an individual agent's *habitus* [emphasis added] that manifests itself most apparently, though not exclusively, in the religious field. It is the principle determining subjective influence on particular religious interests and needs..." (p. 337). Rey (2004) further suggests that agents seek 'religious capital' through exercise of their religious *habitus*. Religious capital encompasses a variety of goods, but they are especially

...the legitimation of the social order, the sanction of wealth and power, ...the sense of meaning that religion brings to peoples' lives [and, especially,] the goods of salvation ('*les biens de salut*'), meaning especially sacraments and any officially recognised membership in an ecclesiastical community that is regarded as a requisite for salvation. (p. 337)

While it would be unlikely for parents themselves to access the more tangible elements of religious capital (for instance, the sacraments) by sending their child to a Catholic school, it is easy to see how doing so might enhance parental access to the less tangible ones: schools often provide parents with social opportunities (volunteering, supervisions, and parent councils, to name but a few), and these may act as means by which parents can increase their own religious capital through vicarious association with the Catholic school. Indeed, with Mass attendance declining throughout North America, affiliation with religious organizations in other ways is necessary for obtaining religious capital and satisfying the religious *habitus*. Catholic schools may provide that connection,

although Bourdieu's work does not mention them specifically. Thus, social identity theory begins to connect religion with school choice.

Secular Goods Theory

A second theory presented by Pelz and den Dulk (2018) is secular goods theory, which “asserts that the demand for [independent] schools comes from a broader group of parents with varied religious backgrounds (or perhaps no religion at all) who are looking for benefits that are unrelated or indirectly related to religion” (p. 86). This theory overlaps with social identity theory in that it suggests that some parents are looking for the products of religion (things like discipline and work ethic, for instance), but are not interested in religion itself. Instead, selection of religious schools is primarily done for secular reasons like those listed above (Pelz & den Dulk, 2018). Green (2018) notes that most research suggests that parents exhibiting the traits of secular goods theory tend to be more prominent than those fitting other theories (p. 530).

Secular goods theory seems to be present in the literature. For instance, parents selecting Catholic schools are frequently concerned with academic performance, affordability, and other ‘value-added’ elements of schools. Each of these things is a ‘secular good’ (as defined in the theory) and helps explain why non-Catholics might send their children to Catholic schools. And, while Catholics may send their children to Catholic schools for the reproduction of religious capital, non-Catholics may be more interested in the reproduction of secular forms of capital. In the case of Catholic schools, this may be social capital—“valued relations with significant others”—or cultural capital—“valued information or educational qualifications” (Bourdieu, 1986; Urban, 2003, p. 360).

Vicarious Religion Theory

Davie's (2007) theory of vicarious religion has already been briefly introduced in the literature review where Rymarz (2013) cites it to explain enrolment in Australia's Catholic schools. Vicarious religion is defined as "the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing" (Davie, 2007, p. 22). Davie's (2007) theory was intended to explain why a large segment of Europe's population remains connected to a religion even if they do not practice it, or if they disagree with some of its tenets. But, it provides a novel basis for exploring Catholic school choice, as well.

The application to parental choice of religious schools is straightforward: research suggests that parents who are even tangentially religious are more likely to send their children to religious schools. Their children form a vicarious connection between the parent and the religious institution in a manner approved of by the parents but without a major commitment on the parents' part (like attendance at Mass every Sunday). At the same time, parents fulfill the obligation of seeing to their children's educations, both religious and secular. This also helps explain why enrolment in Catholic schools is highest in jurisdictions where they are publicly funded: there are no impediments to creating this vicarious relationship.

Davie's (2007) theory works well alongside secular goods theory. In applying Davie's (2007) theory, religion *becomes* something like a secular good since it is valued for its secular purposes over its religious ones. The theory is not intended to explain why all people remain connected with religion, though. Davie (2010) supposes that many

years from now, religion will probably be chosen rather than inherited, presumably because active participation in religion continues to decline.

Applying the Framework

The combination of these three theories in conversation with Bourdieu's (1984) theory of *habitus* provides a framework from which to evaluate the reasoning parents have in selecting independent Catholic high schools for their children.

Social identity theory and secular goods theory are relatively novel. Alongside Bourdieu's theories of *habitus* and religious and social capital, these two theories address both the conscious and unconscious aspects of parental choice of Catholic schools as they emerge in participant interviews.

The application of vicarious religion to school choice has already been done in at least one paper (Rymarz, 2013), and it may help explain the continued existence of religious schools in spite of increasing secularism. Vicarious religion provides a theoretical basis for parental choice that is itself not strictly 'economic' (in the sense of seeking something particular from a school), and therefore helps to account for the unconscious (and *habitus*-influenced) religious element of school choice decisions (alongside social identity theory). Since vicarious religion is likely the most unconscious of the three theories, its manifestation in participant interviews will likely be subtler than the others.

These theories account for a variety of sociological and religious perspectives that parents likely account for, consciously or unconsciously, when making school choice decisions. They should therefore provide a varied lens through which to view parental choice of independent Catholic high schools in Manitoba.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

The major goal of this research project was to identify some of the characteristics of parents who choose Winnipeg's Catholic schools, and why they choose to send their children to them. This study lent itself to a research design that encourages participants to explore as broadly as possible their choice rationales and processes.

Paradigm

I adopted a constructivist paradigm for this study. I did so for a variety of reasons, not least of which is that the purpose of this study was to discover the reasons that parents choose Catholic schools, rather than attempting to isolate any single reason. Thus, the research lent itself to an inductive methodology that allows participants to explain how they construct meaning. This is found in qualitative research rather than the deductive methodologies used in quantitative studies.

Ontologically, this thesis presupposed that people make decisions that are subjective of their own experiences and which are therefore not empirically measurable beyond the reality of the research participants. Rather than quantify or identify truths, the goal was to understand "[participants'] ways of making sense of their activities, experiences, and relationships and how they plan and act in accord with these ways of making sense" (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 3). In so doing, I hoped to identify themes that resonated with the literature, as well as novel categories that were not previously explored. In gathering research, I was conscious of my axiological biases (that is, my own positions on the value of the subject) rather than adopting a dispassionate and epistemologically distant standpoint more reminiscent of a quantitative study. By recognising these, I was better able to minimize their influence in the research protocol

and data analysis. And because I personally interacted with the participants in the study, my research protocol utilized straightforward, colloquial language, and accepted that same language in return. Each of these reasons suggested a qualitative research paradigm as outlined in Creswell (1994, pp. 4–8).

Methodology

This research project was structured as an interview-based qualitative research project as defined primarily in Magnusson and Marecek (2015). Identifying their approach as “interpretive research” (p. 3), they suggest that the goal of interview-based interpretive research “is to understand—that is, to interpret—the meanings that people ascribe to events and actions, how they make these meanings their own, and how they negotiate these meanings in interactions with other people” (p. 2). Thus, they suggest that loosely-structured interviews are the best method of gathering this type of data because they “bring forward the participants’ stories, memories, worldviews, and beliefs...” (p. 4). And, for the researcher, interview-based data collection

provide[s] an effective way to gather material that speaks to interpretive researchers’ interests and goals. This is so because in a research interview, the interviewer asks the participant to explain herself and her world, and the participant has the task of telling the interviewer what she knows in a way that can be understood by an outsider. Interviewing is therefore a good way to locate clues to people’s personal and cultural meanings that would be difficult to find in any other way. (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, pp. 13–14)

For this study, interview-based research was therefore the best methodology. Interview-based qualitative research presupposes “that the individual person—each and

every one of the them—is an important source of knowledge” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2014, p. 28). Since the goal of this study was to understand parental reasoning underlying school choice decisions, individual parental opinion—openly expressed through loosely-structured interviews—was inherently valuable. Moreover, “[t]he aim [of interviews] is to derive as objectively as possible the respondent’s *own* opinions on the subject matter, opinions that will readily be offered up and elaborated on by the respondent when circumstances are conducive to doing so and the proper solicitations [from the researcher] extended” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2014, p. 29). Hence, the loosely-structured nature of a general, interview-based qualitative methodology was effective.

For the research participants (that is, parents), loosely-structured interviews allowed freedom of expression while simultaneously providing some structure to guide responses such that they remained relevant to answering the research questions. In turn, this methodology assisted the researcher by allowing categories to emerge through discussion, rather than beginning with categories (for instance, by using a survey) that may not necessarily have applied to the research participants’ subjective experiences.

Finally, I elected to use a general interview-based qualitative research methodology for two primary reasons. First, interview-based methodologies are widely used for gathering the type of data I sought since they allow participants to speak broadly about their experiences. This produces a wealth of data, as evidenced by the myriad interview-based studies mentioned in the literature review. Second, interview-based methodologies have fewer methodological restrictions than other methods. For instance, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study methodologies (to name but a few) each have more rigid structures that did not lend themselves to the purpose of this

research. Instead, a more general approach—with emphasis on gathering a multitude of perspectives from a variety of participants—was the most appropriate choice.

Participants

This study's target population was parents of students enrolled in independent Catholic high schools in Manitoba. Based on school enrolment reports published by the Government of Manitoba, there are approximately 1400 students in grades 9-12 across all four of Manitoba's Catholic high schools (Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). Although I did not account for siblings attending the same school, nor for deceased or otherwise absent parents, it is reasonable to estimate that there are approximately twice the number of parents as students. Therefore, the target population consisted of roughly 2800 individual parents.

To explore parental choice in some depth, this study sought to recruit between 12 and 15 participants. Magnusson and Marecek (2015) suggest that it is difficult to identify the exact number of participants required in an interpretive (qualitative) study since there is a wide variation in the purposes of such studies. But, for interview-based qualitative research, Robinson (2014) suggests that “[a sample size of 3-16 participants] provides scope for developing cross-case generalities, while preventing the researcher being bogged down in data, and permitting individuals within the sample to be given a defined identity, rather than being subsumed into an anonymous part of the larger whole” (p. 29).

The study attracted 16 participants in total, though two of them were ruled ineligible because I had a close association with their children. Another did not attend the scheduled interview and did not respond to follow-up emails. Thus, the results of this study come from interviews with 13 participants, although only from three of Winnipeg's

four Catholic high schools (one—St Boniface Diocesan High School—did not respond to the offer to participate).

Methods

Sampling and Recruitment

Participants in this study were purposefully sampled using homogenous sampling. Purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of particular sites and individuals that were most likely to contribute useful data for understanding the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). A sub-type of purposeful sampling—homogeneous sampling—was used since the goal of this research project was to study the responses of a certain demographically homogeneous group with specific inclusion criteria: that is, parents who have children enrolled in independent Catholic high schools in Manitoba (Creswell, 2012; Robinson, 2014). No other inclusion criteria were sought, but certain parents were excluded from this study by virtue of imbalanced power relationships between them and/or their children and me (this will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter).

Participants were invited to volunteer for this study through an invitation letter that was distributed to them by way of the schools to which they are affiliated (see appendices B and C). Robinson (2014) suggests that volunteer participants are subject to self-selection bias in that the sample population will represent only those who choose to participate. Thus, “this is likely to lead to a sample containing individuals who are more open, more patient and more interested in the topic than the general sample universe” (Robinson, 2014, p. 36). He goes on to note that self-selection bias cannot be avoided in interview-based qualitative research beyond recognizing that it will occur.

Data Collection

Once participants were identified, the data that they provided was collected through individual, semi-structured interviews. Although time consuming, in-person interviewing was useful since it allowed for the gathering of “descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher [could] develop insights on how subjects interpret[ed] some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103). Individual interviews also had further benefits over less personal forms of interviewing (like email interviewing, for instance) since they allowed the researcher to ask immediate follow-up questions. They also helped ensure that participants gave the most honest and specific detail, since there were no other participants with whom they might have had a relationship (and who might have influenced them) present in the interview (Beitin, 2014).

Before each interview began, the participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form (appendix D) and were able to ask any questions that they might have had about the process. After these formalities were concluded, the research protocol (appendix E) began with loosely-structured questions designed to illicit broad, open-ended responses. The interviews concluded with more structured demographic questions. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed afterwards.

Data Analysis

Upon conclusion of the research, there were 13 interview transcripts that required analysis. The transcribed data was coded and sorted using a computer-based qualitative research program (*NVivo*). Insofar as was possible, data was analyzed as it is collected.

I found data that matched a number of coding categories suggested by the literature review and the theoretical framework. These *a priori* codes were useful for organizing data that was anticipated, enhancing ease of analysis (Miles et al., 2020). However, other codes were also needed to organize information particular to this project's data, and so novel codes revealed themselves during my analysis (Gough & Scott, 2000).

It was also useful to begin with some general coding categories that were likely to be found in the data but that are less specific than those found in the literature review or theoretical framework. Creswell (2012, p. 244) outlines seven such categories, each of which was found in this study. These codes include settings and context, perspectives, ways of thinking, processes, activities, strategies, and relationships and social structures. While each of these codes was broadly useful, narrower codes developed as the data suggested them (Creswell, 2012). These Creswell (2012) calls "*in vivo* codes" (p. 244). Codes developed such that they were meaningful to me while simultaneously respecting the internal and personal nature of the interviews themselves (Gough & Scott, 2000).

Codes were then grouped into themes that were common across the data. Cases were coded individually before cross-case analysis was completed. This allowed me to notice themes that emerged early and prepare for them across cases as research continued. This also made it easier to adapt the interview protocol to explore themes that emerged early in the research process.

Once thematic coding was complete, the data was analyzed through the theoretical framework mentioned in chapter three, creating a variety of theoretical constructs that guided the organization of the findings chapter (Auerbach & Silverstein,

2003). First in this findings chapter come demographic descriptions of all of the participants, as well as a general discussion of the emergent themes (Creswell, 2012). Thereafter, the findings are presented using a thematic approach which includes “extensive discussion about the major themes that arise from a qualitative database [using] extensive quotes [sic] and rich details to support the themes” (Creswell, 2012, p. 274). Simultaneously, participants’ responses were juxtaposed with existing literature and theory. The concluding chapter includes discussion of the study’s contributions, limitations, implications for stakeholders, and recommendations for future research (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Credibility

Qualitative research is concerned with peoples’ understandings and constructions of reality (Gubrium & Holstein, 2014; Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Merriam, 2009). As such, determining the credibility of a qualitative research project is less a process of trying to find isomorphism in the data, and more about ensuring that the data collected is interpreted such that the subjects’ experiences are faithfully presented.

Since this project involved interviews rather than observations, its internal credibility was quite high. In other words, participants’ subjective experiences are their own, and so as long as they were honestly given during the interview process then their credibility is difficult to question. Beiten (2014) notes that individual interviews often result in more candid responses than other methodological approaches, but can also result in participants exaggerating information since they are isolated from other participants. However, participants were reminded that candid responses would facilitate more meaningful understanding of the phenomenon.

External credibility is another concern. While the participants provided a wealth of data concerning their choices of independent Catholic high schools in Winnipeg, these schools are sufficiently unique that their reasons may not be applicable to Catholic schools elsewhere. Thus, the data collected might be somewhat valid if applied to Catholic elementary schools in Manitoba (which share similar contexts with the high schools), possibly valid for independent (but funded) Catholic schools in other provinces, and perhaps valid for jurisdictions with fully-funded or entirely unfunded Catholic schools. Though these are just examples of how this project's external validity might manifest, the goal was to identify school choice characteristics as they apply to independent Catholic high schools in Manitoba. Since the goal was to interview parents from these schools, the external validity for those particular schools should be relatively high, despite the small sample size.

Ethical Considerations

There were minimal risks for participants in this study, or for any third party. Any that might have existed were likely minimized by participant confidentiality. In order to protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms were assigned to each. Pseudonyms were also applied to any people, schools, or other locative data disclosed during interviews such that participants could not be identified by association. All raw participant data was stored on password-protected computers and phones to which only the researcher had access (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

Although the study's risks were minimal, all qualitative research has the potential for power imbalances between the researcher and the participants (van den Hoonaard, 2019). Since I work at one of the schools that was studied, I excluded from the participant

population those parents who have children that I taught or supervised in an extracurricular program. In other words, I did not interview parents of any student with whom I had a direct power relationship. This should have helped to avoid influencing participants towards offering responses that might otherwise be tailored to me as an agent of the school (Berger, 2015). Similarly, this should have avoided constraining participant responses, who may have withheld information if I had a power relationship with their child.

However, I did not exclude parents of students with whom I had only an indirect power relationship by virtue of my employment at the same school as their child. I emphasized with these parents the confidentiality of any information disclosed during interviews and that they were free not to answer any questions that I asked. These procedures minimized conflicts of interest between these parents, their children, and me throughout the research process. They were also mentioned in the participant letter (appendix C) and were also discussed thoroughly in the informed consent process, through which

the participant is given the authority to assess his or her own participation in the research endeavour, and the researcher is charged with the obligation to provide truthful and understandable information the perceived benefits and risks involved in participating. The principle of counterbalancing the asymmetry of power between the powerful researchers and the less powerful participants is fully recognized. (Juritzen et al., 2011, p. 643)

Each participant received and signed an informed consent form that outlined these details, and they were able to withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis

had begun. Had any chosen to do so, all of the data that they supplied would have been removed from the study and destroyed. Participants also had the option to receive a final copy of the research upon dissemination, and most elected to do so.

After informed consent was obtained, data gathering began. Interviews did not exceed 90 minutes. Interviews occurred at sites amenable to the researcher and the participant. No deception was employed at any point in the research process, and data was gathered only directly. Participants were not compensated.

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

Another ethical concern was researcher reflexivity and positionality. Creswell (2012) defines reflexivity as “the researcher being aware of and openly discussing his or her role in the study in a way that honors and respects the site and participants” (p. 474). Berger (2015) notes that “researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal” (p. 220).

One of the primary areas in which a researcher must be reflexive is positionality, or “the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt *within* a given research study” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 71). Positionality relates to the researcher’s position relative to the subject being studied, the study’s participants, and the research’s context (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 71). Elements of positionality include “culture, class, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, childhood lived experiences and so on” (Rowe, 2014, p. 627). Berger (2015) suggests that researcher positionality affects research in three main ways: (a) access to participants increases, since some “may be more willing to

share their experiences with a researcher whom they perceive as sympathetic” (p. 220); (b) the relationship between the researcher and the participants affects what information is shared; and (c) the researcher’s own worldview colours how data is interpreted (p. 220-221). This third point is particularly significant, since the public rarely have access to the raw data of qualitative research and therefore must rely on the researcher’s interpretation (Dean et al., 2018). So, where do I stand?

First, as a white, upper middle-class male, I occupy a privileged social group that may be different than some of the participants in this study. Participants from other social groups—especially those in a lower socio-economic bracket; racial, linguistic, and/or sexual minorities; or women—may have found it difficult to interact with me as a result of this disparity, or may have thought that I was hoping for a particular answer during interviews. Furthermore, since I am a practicing Roman Catholic studying Catholic schools, and since I work at one of the schools, participants may have seen me as an authority figure and shaped their answers accordingly. This is a problem that occurs frequently in insider research, and I believe that it was effectively accounted for by excluding parents of students that I teach or supervise in any extracurricular programs. The remaining participant pool should have had less personal knowledge of me, and thus have been less constrained in their responses.

Second, since I teach at one of the schools being studied, I needed to address some of the advantages and disadvantages inherent in ‘insider’ research. Toy-Cronin (2019) notes a variety of these benefits, like better access, understanding, and rapport. Thomson and Gunter (2011) also note that insiders are better able to understand local phenomena that might be otherwise missed or misinterpreted by an outsider (p. 18).

Conversely, Toy-Cronin (2019) points out that insider researchers can often lack subjectivity and have inherent biases, and that it can be difficult for them to maintain confidentiality (p. 455).

I have significant insider knowledge about Manitoba's Catholic high schools and a significant personal interest in why parents send their children to these schools: my job depends on continued enrolment. There are many disincentives to sending one's children to a Catholic high school in Manitoba, not least of which is the burden of tuition, which families pay over and above their school taxes. And while these high schools are all in Winnipeg, they are not equidistant from each other (three of them are no more than six kilometres from each other, all on the west side of the city), so distance may also be a consideration for some families. Whatever parents' reasons for sending their children to these schools, knowing them will help Catholic schools become more attractive to prospective families, which indirectly benefits me.

Assumptions

As I chose to conduct interviews, the primary assumption underlying this study was the presumption of honesty on the part of the participants. I have no reason to suppose that any of them were deceitful, but it is nevertheless possible. However, I operated on the assumption that the study's participants were not attempting to deceive.

Another assumption is that participants were conscious of all of their reasons for choosing Catholic high schools for their children. Considering parents have to choose to send their children to these schools and that in Manitoba this choice comes with a distinct opportunity cost, one assumes an underlying process that includes rationally considered reasons. But, participants' understanding of their own actions may have been limited.

Chapter Five: Findings and Analysis

This chapter will outline the findings and provide analysis of the 13 semi-structured, qualitative interviews conducted for this thesis, whose purpose was to explore which parents choose Catholic high schools in Winnipeg and why they do so. The study was guided by several social theories related to Catholic school choice (see chapter three). The findings are divided into three themes: (1) religious attitudes in participant school choice decisions, which include participants' own religious beliefs and their opinions of their school of choice's religious character; (2) intrinsic considerations in participant school choice decisions, which include elements of the schools themselves that participants found attractive (except religion); and (3) extrinsic considerations in participant school choice decisions, which include any elements separate from the character of the school and participant religion. Within each of these three themes, codes emerged based on participant responses.

Throughout this chapter, some of the participant quotations have been edited to maintain the anonymity of the participant, the participant's child, or the school with which the participant is affiliated, but the spirit of those quotations has been maintained.

The Socioeconomic Demographics of Catholic High School Parents

The 13 participants in this study were the first who volunteered and were eligible for participation. In total, 16 parents volunteered but two were ruled ineligible because I currently teach their children and one did not arrive for their interview. The participants came from each of the three participating schools in almost equal proportion: five from one school, and four from each of the other two. In addition, two of the participants had children enrolled in more than one of the Catholic high schools in this study, and four had

other children who had previously graduated from one of Manitoba's Catholic high schools. Two participants also had high school aged children who were enrolled in public schools (in addition to their children in Catholic high schools). All but one of the participants in this study were in agreement with their spouses about sending their children to a Catholic high school.

Because Manitoba has few Catholic high schools, the schools with which the participants are individually affiliated have not been identified in order to protect participant anonymity. Otherwise, specific participant demographics are given in table two (below). In general, participants in this study tended to be highly educated, religious, and in socially and economically stable families. Most also tended to be native-born Canadians, although there was a sizeable immigrant population (four individuals) as a proportion of the participants.

Table 2: Participant Demographics

	Participant Pseudonyms (Sex) (Grouped by Self-Reported Religiosity)	Participant Demographics				Family Demographics				
		Religion	Immigration Status	Highest Level of Education	Attended Catholic School?	Marital Status	Household Income	# of Children	# of Children at or graduated from Catholic Schools	Home Language
More-Practicing Catholic	Cecilia (F)	Catholic	Citizen (naturalized)	Doctorate	Yes	Married (16 years)	\$190000	1	1	Tagalog
	Hildegard (F)	Catholic	Citizen (naturalized)	Bachelor's	Yes	Married (18 years)	\$130000	2	2	Tagalog
	Leo (M)	Catholic	Citizen (naturalized)	Master's	Yes	Married	\$70000-\$100000	2	1	Malayalam
	Mary (F)	Catholic	Permanent resident	Bachelor's	Yes	Married (19 years)	No response	3	1	Malayalam
	Robert (M)	Catholic	Citizen (birth)	Bachelor's	No	Married (20 years)	No response	5	1	English
Less-Practicing Catholic	Agnes (F)	Catholic	Citizen (birth)	Master's	No	Married (25 years)	\$185000	2	2	English
	Albert (M)	Catholic	Citizen (birth)	Bachelor's	No	Married (29 years)	\$100000	3	3	English
	Bede (M)	Catholic	Citizen (birth)	Master's	Yes	Married (20 years)	No response	3	1	English
	Felicity (F)	Catholic	Citizen (birth)	Bachelor's	Yes	Married (25 years)	No response	3	3	English
	Hilary (F)	Catholic	Citizen (birth)	Bachelor's	No	Divorced	\$100000	3	2	English
	Teresa (F)	Catholic	Citizen (birth)	Master's	Yes	Married (25 years)	\$200000	2	2	English
Non-Catholic	Catherine (F)	Christian	Citizen (birth)	Master's	No	Married (23 years)	No response	2	1	English & French
	Joan (F)	Christian	Citizen (birth)	Master's	No	Married (16 years)	No response	2	1	English

A number of interesting trends can be seen in the participant demographic data. For instance, all of the participants identify as religious (though to varying degrees) and all of them identify as Christian, with the majority as Catholic. Each of the participants also has, at minimum, a bachelor's degree-level of education, and more than half are educated at the master's or doctoral level. Furthermore, the household income (of those who responded to that question) is generally well above Winnipeg's 2015 median household income of \$70795 (Statistics Canada, 2016a). The vast majority of participants are also married, and the average length of those marriages is over 21 years. Female participants outnumbered male participants (nine females versus four males). Finally, there were four immigrants to Canada in the study: two from southern India (Kerala), and two from the Philippines. Several of the participants attended Catholic schools themselves (either in their primary or secondary schooling, or at university); most of the others attended public schools, with one attending a secular independent school. In general, though there are some differences among the participants, most of them are demographically similar. A more detailed analysis of the participant demographics follows.

Participant Education

Each of the participants in this study was university educated to at least the bachelor's degree level, which several studies cite as indicative of being more active in choosing schools than parents with less formal education. More education also makes an individual more likely to choose independent schools. Crucially, university educated parents also commonly choose an education similar to the one that they received, and among the participants in this study, that rings particularly true (Buddin et al., 1998;

Davies & Aurini, 2011; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Hoffer et al., 1985; Ogawa & Dutton, 1997). Most of the participants (10 of 13) went to independent schools. Of these ten, seven went to Catholic schools themselves. Of the three remaining, one went to a secular independent school and two went to public schools.

In Australian studies of parent educational attainment as it relates to school choice, researchers found limited correlation between parental education and enrolment in Catholic schools. They did find, though, that parents with more formal education tended to choose independent schools for their children (Dearden et al., 2011; Kelley & Evans, 2004; Le & Miller, 2003; Neal, 1997; Vella, 1999).

However, other Australian studies indicate significant generational effects in choosing a school, meaning that parents who went to Catholic schools are about 20% more likely to send their children to Catholic schools, even if the parents themselves are not Catholic (Dearden et al., 2011; Graetz, 1990). It seems that same trend may exist among the participants in this study. One participant (Bede) had some of his other children in secular schools despite having gone to a Catholic school himself. He indicated that his other children were in secular schools primarily for financial reasons. All of the other Catholics in the study who had themselves attended Catholic schools had their school-aged children enrolled in Catholic schools. Thus, it seems that there is some generational effect in choice of Winnipeg's Catholic schools, at least among Catholics who attended Catholic schools. Whether or not the generational effect applies to non-Catholics who attended Catholic schools is unclear since the two non-Catholic participants in this study attended non-Catholic schools.

Participant Religion

Unsurprisingly, this thesis's findings agree with much of the literature: being religious correlates positively with selecting a religious school for one's children (Ajuwon & Bradshaw, 2009; Anderson, 1988; Cohen-Zada & Sander, 2008; Ji & Boyatt, 2007; Kelley & Evans, 2004; Le & Miller, 2003; Long & Toma, 1988; Moe, 2001; Sander, 2005a; Sander & Cohen-Zada, 2012; Vella, 1999; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). Sander (2005b) found that this correlation is particularly strong among Catholics. In this study, every participant identified as Christian, and most of them (11 of 13) as Catholic. Although this likely comes as no surprise to most, what might be surprising is the differing level of religious practice among the participants. For the purposes of this section, I have grouped the parents according to their religious self-identification, as well as their self-reported religious practices. The first group includes the two non-Catholic participants; the next two groups divide the participants based upon their adherence to the first of the Precepts of the Catholic Church, which is attendance at Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation.¹⁴

Non-Catholic Christians. Catherine was perhaps the least traditionally religious participant in the group. For her, the religious nature of the school was an added value but did not really influence her decision in any meaningful way. Moreover, her family's religious practices are limited to attending church at Christmas and Easter, which is a lower level of self-reported religious practice than any other participant in the study. Catherine is therefore fairly anomalous, since the literature indicates that, for self-

¹⁴ According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997), the Precepts of the Church are the "indispensable minimum" required of all Catholics (§§2041-2043). A similar baseline for Catholic religious practice has been used in other studies of Catholic school choice (i.e. Kelley & Evans, 2004; Sander, 2005a).

identified Christians, religion is a major choice factor (alongside academic performance) (Prichard & Swezey, 2016).

Catherine's description of her school choice rationale provides perhaps the starkest example of what Pelz and den Dulk (2018) have termed secular goods theory:

Parents acting according to the secular goods theory...may enroll their children in religious schools that lie outside of their specific religious tradition, including parents with no religious affiliation, as religion is not the primary basis of these decisions. Similarly, the religious commitment of parents will likely not be a factor in the type of private schools they choose for their children. (p. 9)

Indeed, it seems that Catherine's own religious affiliation had no impact on her decision. Instead, she chose the school for strong academics, strong athletics, and for its co-educational or single-sex nature. Each of these may rightly be termed a 'secular good' in Pelz and den Dulk's (2018) definition.

Based on her descriptions of her religious practices, Joan is likely next to Catherine in terms of having the least amount of active religious practice in her household. That being said—and unlike Catherine—religion was the major determinant in her choice, aligning with Prichard and Swezey (2016). Her son had also recently converted to Catholicism independently of the rest of the family, and she indicated that his own religious desires were important when the family was choosing. Kelley and Evans (2004) found that in Australian Catholic schools, a high proportion of the non-Catholic students were students from families of other Christian denominations. It is hard to consider two parents as confirmation of this finding in the data here, but it does

indicate that non-Catholic Christian families are considering Catholic schools for both religious and secular reasons.

Catholics. The remaining participants in the study are all Catholics. One of them is a convert, and the others are all so-called ‘Cradle Catholics’; that is, they were all born to Catholic parents and were raised Catholic. Only one of the Catholic participants knew that the Church imposed upon Catholics an obligation to send their children to Catholic schools (if they are able to do so), so only one could have possibly acted on this obligation. That said, these participants had the most descriptive detail in their self-reported individual and family religious practices. I have divided the study’s Catholics into two categories—less-practicing and more-practicing—based on their self-reported religious proclivities.

Less-Practicing Catholics. In the middle range of self-reported religious practices fall Agnes, Albert, Bede, Felicity, Hilary, and Teresa, all of whom indicated that their attendance at Mass was sporadic but that they did attend when they could. All of them indicated that their children had all been catechized and received the traditional Catholic sacraments of initiation (baptism, Eucharist, and confirmation). Furthermore, each indicated some household religious practices (like prayers before meals, or having crucifixes or icons on display, for instance). Despite each having religious practices that would be considered less than the Catholic Church’s minimum requirement, they all said that religion was important in their choice, aligning with the results of several studies (Greeley & Rossi, 1966; Long & Toma, 1988; Sander, 2005a).

What might be most interesting about this group is that, despite being inconsistent in the practice of their religion, each of them valued religion enough to ensure that their

children were fully catechized¹⁵ and to use religion as a determinant for their school choice preferences. This echoes a study of Australian Catholic school parents, which found that even nominal Catholics were more likely to send their children to Catholic schools (Kelley & Evans, 2004). What is not immediately clear is why Catholics who have only a tangential practice of their faiths are interested in sending their children to Catholic schools. Two theories may offer answers.

The first is social identity theory, which postulates that parents will choose schools that will help replicate a particular social characteristic in their children (in this case, religion). Iannaccone (1990) notes that people become far less likely to shift their religious beliefs as they age, and that religious capital is more useful to an individual if it is developed early. As such, choice of a religious school by religious parents would seem logical for building religious capital (and religious *habitus*) in their children.

However, this presupposes that the parents value religion highly. I do not mean to suggest here that the less-practicing Catholic participants do not value their religion at all, for if they did not then it certainly would not have been consistently mentioned by each of them as a choice consideration. But it is difficult to reconcile two seeming contradictions: that (a) these participants do not usually meet the minimum requirements of practice required of their faith, and yet (b) they want their child religiously educated and consistently rank this among the most important considerations in their choice of school. In other words, despite eschewing certain of Catholicism's religious obligations, they are happy to have these same obligations taught to their children.

¹⁵ Which generally happens through parishes rather than schools, suggesting another voluntary opportunity cost.

Moreover, even if social identity theory is plausible in the case of these participants, an average participant would almost certainly not be conscious of it. Here is an example of what I mean: certainly, many of the participants in this group found it important that their children receive a religious education, but a few indicated that they valued it because it would allow their children the freedom to choose what religion to believe in, even if it was not Catholicism. That does not fit with social identity theory, unless the notion of religious capital can be divorced from adherence to a specific religion and be reframed as simply ‘being religious,’ which I doubt.

Here enters Davie’s (2007) theory of vicarious religion: “the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing” (p. 22). Whereas social identity theory supposes that parents are trying to replicate a version of their own religious *habitus* in their children, my suspicion is that some parents (especially the ones for whom religious practices are less frequent or more perfunctory) use Catholic school enrolment as a sort of ‘spiritual salve,’ easing for them, in a way, the unconscious guilt they feel about their inactive religious practices, or even the cognitive dissonance of identifying as Catholic but holding positions at odds with the Church’s.¹⁶ Why else would a participant frequently inconvenience themselves—by selecting a school far from home, by spending thousands on tuition, or even by selecting a school at odds with the participant’s beliefs—if there was no underlying sense of obligation that motivates these particular choices?

¹⁶ One participant in this group, for instance, expressed disapproval with Catholic teaching on gay marriage but nevertheless chose a Catholic school.

It is possible that secular goods theory could help explain the participants' decisions in this case, though there are secular independent schools in Manitoba that compete with Catholic schools and have similar secular characteristics (for instance, strong academics). That being said, higher tuitions at these secular schools might be an incentive towards choice of a Catholic school. So, too, might other qualities, like a breadth of sports or other extra-curricular activities. So, if parents are behaving 'secularly,' then the choice of a Catholic school must have a motive that transcends the mere transmission of religious *habitus* across generational lines. That, however, may be the motivation of the Catholics in the next group.

More-Practicing Catholics. The final group of parents includes Cecilia, Hildegard, Leo, Mary, and Robert, all of whom reported attending Mass at least every Sunday.¹⁷ Among U.S. Catholics, Sander and Cohen-Zada (2012) found that parents who attended church at least weekly were considerably more likely to choose a Catholic school for their child than those who rarely or never attend. Of the participants in this group, two said that they attended Mass more than once a week and prayed daily together as a family. Another indicated that she had been a postulant nun for two years, and still another spoke about considering being a priest before opting for marriage.

With the exception of Robert, each of these participants indicated that the most important reason for choosing a Catholic high school was that their children's faith should be central in their education. All of the participants in this group spent much of their interview discussing the importance of an education that puts knowledge of God at

¹⁷ Interestingly, this group includes all of the immigrants in the study—two from the Philippines and two from Kerala in south India—suggesting a higher-level of religiosity among this group.

its centre; two of the participants went even so far as to critique their schools of choice for diluting Catholic teaching. For Robert, this was important too, but he mentioned the school's accountability to parents as his primary driver (in large part because of dissatisfaction with this aspect of his older children's educations in public schools).

Elements of social identity theory were most prominent among this subset of participants. Most were open about their desire that their religious tradition be passed along to their children, especially in a way that the participants in the 'less-practicing' category were not. Furthermore, most continually returned to religion in their responses, even when asked about the other elements of school choice that might have mattered to them (like academic performance or distance from home). Although several indicated that they selected among different Catholic schools—especially regarding proximity to home or their perception of the school's catholicity—none entertained non-Catholic schools at all. Social identity theory seems present in this group of participants, and it is easy to see how the choice of a Catholic school fits well with Bourdieu's ideas of religious *habitus* and capital for this group, too: they are all deeply connected to Catholic religious communities that are mostly separate from the schools that they chose, and the parents' religious capital would likely be ameliorated by having children in Catholic schools; at the very least, their religious capital would be maintained in a way it might not be had they chosen secular schools for their children (Rey, 2004).

Participant Family Income

Although only about half (seven) of the participants indicated their household income, those who did were uniformly above the median household income for Winnipeg (\$70795 (Statistics Canada, 2016a)). In fact, all but one of them were well above it.

In general, most U.S. studies about household income as it relates to school choice indicate a strong positive correlation between household income and selection of independent schools (Buddin et al., 1998; Jones, 2017; Reichard, 2012; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). Few of these studies discuss Catholic schools specifically, though Catholic schools are in all of the data sets. It is difficult to say that the findings in this study correlate with the U.S. literature since tuitions in U.S. independent schools are usually much higher than the tuitions at Catholic schools in Manitoba¹⁸, especially because the latter receive partial government funding. So, a probable reason why households with children enrolled in U.S. independent schools have higher incomes is that these schools simply require a higher household income in order to meet tuition requirements. Moreover, parents with higher incomes are generally the ones most able to exercise school choice preferences. That being said, Buddin et al. (1998) did find that families with higher incomes tended to choose parochial schools, so there does seem to be a relationship between higher family incomes and selection of Catholic schools. In this study, each of the participants who disclosed their income also identified as Catholic, with religion being a strong determinant in their selection of Catholic schools. This is likely coincidental, however, since families with higher incomes are generally more likely to choose independent schools, Catholic or otherwise.

Australian studies do not offer much by way of explanation for why many of the study's participants had higher than average incomes, either. In general, most Australian studies indicate that household income does not strongly correlate with selection of

¹⁸ Tuition at each of Manitoba's Catholic high schools varies between about \$4000-\$9000. See table one on page 17 for exact tuition rates.

Catholic schools (Dearden et al., 2011; Kelley & Evans, 2004), though this is perhaps because Australia's Catholic schools receive partial funding (like Manitoba's) and are therefore more financially accessible. However, among the participants in this study who disclosed their household incomes, higher than average household income was the norm, so affordability would not likely have been as much of a consideration to begin with.

Canadian studies were the most accurate at explaining the how the household income of participants in this study related to their selection of Catholic schools. Bosetti and Pyryt (2007) note that among families with children in independent religious schools, approximately 14% have incomes above \$150000. And, among families with children enrolled in independent schools as a whole, this percentage rises to 44% (p. 97). But, Catholic schools are mostly excluded in this study (since they are publicly funded in Alberta, where the study took place). In short, how significant household income is as a school choice determinant of Catholic school choice in Winnipeg remains unclear, especially since nearly half of this study's participants chose not to disclose their incomes at all. Further research about the relationship between household income and selection of Catholic schools in Winnipeg is required.

Other Demographic Data

There are a variety of other demographic factors that emerged during my research but that did not commonly occur in the literature review. Among these were marital status and national origin and language.

Marital Status. Participant marital status was not a determinant of Catholic school choice in any of the literature that I could find, so to what degree it affects school choice decisions is unclear. But, it is interesting that in this study, all but one of the

participants were married, and most had been married a long time (an average length of about 21 years). And, with one exception, participants were in agreement with their child's other parent about the choice of school, which accords with a Spanish study of husbands' and wives' individual opinions in school choice decisions (Mariel et al., 2018).

National Origin and Language. Similar to participant marital status, national origin and language do not reveal themselves as qualities specific to choice of Manitoba's Catholic schools in particular. However, there have been a plethora of studies that do evaluate national origins and language in school choice generally. For instance, Yoon and Gulson (2010) found that parents in Vancouver tended to choose schools that reinforced their own linguistic preferences, especially in favour of English. They note that "[l]anguage is notable as one of the essential cultural practices adding to the parents' feeling of cultural and national belonging" (pp. 708-9). Although this may perhaps be true of parental choice in some cases, the linguistic variation among participants in this study suggests that a search for linguistic homogeneity is not the primary driver of Catholic school selection.¹⁹ Nor, in fact, would it be expected to be nowadays given that Catholicism is a religion that no longer has major linguistic barriers, with formal worship practices conducted in the vernacular in most instances.

Furthermore, although most participants in the study were born in Canada, there were a fair proportion of immigrants (4 of 13; nearly 31%) who had naturalized as Canadians (or were in the process of doing so). Also, this subset of participants seemed in no way forced into attendance at the Catholic schools with comparatively lower tuitions.

¹⁹ Historically, Catholic school selection in Canada was intrinsically linked to language, particularly. See chapter one for more on the French Catholic/English Protestant divide.

Of the four, the three who disclosed their incomes were above Winnipeg's median (and two of them by a significant margin). And, only one had a child in the school with the lowest tuition; the three others had their children in the schools with the highest tuitions. So, it does not appear that national origin is a great identifier for Catholic school choice in Winnipeg based on the diverse national origins of this study's participants.

That being said, the absence of one of Manitoba's Catholic schools in this study skews this observation somewhat. St Maurice School and St Boniface Diocesan High School (the latter of which did not participate) are both located in less affluent—though by no means impoverished—areas of Winnipeg than St Paul's High School and St Mary's Academy. They might be expected, therefore, to attract families with lower incomes, which could include new immigrants to Canada. But this trend does not emerge from the data, since the participants in this study are drawn in almost equal proportion from each of the three schools represented (and because, for the most part, parents indicated that the actual location of the school in relation to the home was not a significant consideration in their decision). In short, it seems clear that neither national origin nor home language play a significance role in the choice of Catholic high schools in Manitoba, though the participant pool is hardly representative enough either way to draw a conclusion.

Religious, Academic, and Financial Considerations for Catholic School Choice

Coupled with their affordability, the religious and academic characteristics of Catholic schools were the primary themes that recurred most frequently in the literature about Catholic school choice and were thus the three main school choice characteristics that this thesis sought to explore. That being said, there were a variety of other

characteristics that participants identified as important when deciding on their schools of choice. Since religion is an element common to both the study's participants and each of the schools they chose, it is the first theme discussed. It is followed by the other intrinsic qualities of the schools valued by the participants (like academics), and then by those qualities extrinsic to the school, such as a child's desire to attend.

Theme One: Religious Attitudes in Participant School Choice Decisions

The first question that was asked to each of the participants was also the most general: Why did you choose a Catholic high school for your child? With only one exception, each of the participants mentioned that the Catholic religious element of the school was a reason central to their choice. However, the degree to which the religious nature of the school played a role in the participant's school choice decision varied widely. For instance, several of the participants indicated that the religious identity of the school was the overriding factor for their choice. Teresa said that her primary reason for choosing a Catholic high school was "Catholic immersion:"

When the kids were little, we had a choice between regular school, French immersion (because we're not Francophone), or Catholic school. And the reason [we chose a Catholic high school] is because we wanted them to be educated in a Catholic environment so that they could live in a Catholic environment. French was a factor we considered but quickly dismissed as not as important as living in a Catholic environment and the freedom to explore if that's the life they want to have.

Teresa's rationale was similarly echoed by another participant. Leo's choice of a Catholic school had a more theological tone:

The basic reason that I chose a Catholic school for my children is because I'm Catholic. I grew up studying in Catholic schools, and that helped me realize the importance of Catholic education. [...]. I want [my children] to understand that God is number one in their life. You know, if you go to a public school, because of its secular nature, you don't talk about God. So, I basically fear that they would grow up thinking that, you know, it's whatever...without God.

Leo was, in fact, so interested in the catholicity of the school, he indicated that he would not send his children to any of the other Catholic schools (that his children were eligible to attend) even if he saved money doing so. He was particularly wary of the catholicity of one of the other Catholic schools, an opinion echoed by Mary—whose children attended said school—and who was another participant for whom the Catholic identity of the school was paramount in her choice.²⁰ She indicated that, after she immigrated to Canada, she was shocked to see no references to Jesus Christ during her children's Christmas celebration in their public school. However, she was subsequently disappointed in her choice of Catholic school (though not enough to move her children) because she felt that it was not doing an effective job at teaching Catholic doctrine.

The desire for religious education being the primary motivator for these parents suggests a strong correlation with social identity theory and the reproduction of religious *habitus*, as discussed elsewhere. It seems clear from these participants' responses that they are overtly attempting to ensure a particular religious outcome for their children, and

²⁰ Mary's concerns with her child's school's catholicity related to the school supposedly teaching things contrary to Catholic sexual morality, especially related to fornication, contraception, and abortion. Leo mentioned that he had heard similar concerns anecdotally.

that their choice of Catholic schools is meant to assist them in achieving that outcome. Research suggests that their decision might be effective: Perl and Gray (2007) note that attending Catholic schools tends to result in students continuing to identify as Catholic in later life. Cohen-Zada and Justman (2012) also note that sending children to religious schools tends to ease “the expected religious friction” (p. 951) between parents and children, presumably because children will encounter religion in a valued way outside of the home.

Although Teresa, Leo, and Mary placed the most importance of their choice on the religious nature of their school choice, most of the other participants agreed that religion was at least an important element of their decision. Several of the participants indicated that their choice of Catholic schools was important in large part because the schools would echo the home experiences of their children, which aligns with prior literature on Catholic school choice (Cohen-Zada & Justman, 2012; Guzmán et al., 2012; Hoxby, 1998; Ji & Boyatt, 2007; Lankford & Wyckoff, 1992; Reichard, 2012). Cecilia said that

[w]e have been raised Roman Catholic, my husband and me and our family, and we wanted to continue with that. And it's better if you don't have discordance between school and home because [my child] spends more than half the day in school and sometimes more hours than [my child] would at home. [...]. So when [my child] goes to school, everything we discuss at home is intensified at school.

It validates what we have: our belief, and our practice, and our values.

Felicity had similar reasoning, saying that “[the school] generally follows our line of thinking.” Most of the other participants were less expressive in elucidating their

reasoning. A few indicated that their own identification as Catholic was a significant factor in their choice, but did not elaborate much; a few gave the impression that the link between the family's religious tradition and their choice of school was self-evident. Joan was perhaps the most candid in her expectations of the religious nature of the school: "the fact that [it was] a Christian school meant a lot to us as well, because we weren't necessarily giving [our children] that church part." Joan's response provides one of the most direct connections to Davie's (2007) theory of vicarious religion as it directly states that the family's choice of school was expected to supplement their own lack of household religious practices; this was implied in several other participants' responses as well, although social identity theory was more overt.

Several of the participants also indicated that the Catholic nature of the school was important to them more for certain elements that come along with Catholicism rather than for its belief system or liturgical practices, reflecting Pelz and den Dulk's (2018) secular goods theory. For instance, Robert said that he liked

that religion was also part of the curriculum and not only part of the curriculum where it's a course being taken, but it's part of the culture of the school. [...].

And, I love the fact that [the school] can go back to a set of morals that are very well established, very clear, and talk to [the students] in a way that could never occur in a public school, or a non faith-based school. [...]. [The religious nature of the school] provides a basis that you can build your life on regardless of whether or not you decide that you're going to participate in all the sacraments and so forth. That's...that's not as important as understanding there's right and wrong.

Several others echoed Robert's opinion, suggesting that the moral values and social justice elements of Catholic theology—like being grateful and generous, and an emphasis on charity and volunteerism and care for the poor and vulnerable—were more important to them than the religious values of the school. Similarly, Felicity linked the religious aspect of her choice to a desire for the structure inherent in Catholicism.

Other participants enjoyed the academic elements of Catholicism that came with their choice. Agnes was pleased that attending a religious school meant learning about other world religions: "The thing that I thought was very, very good is the breadth of the religious education. That is wasn't just Catholic; that they learned about world religions." In a similar vein, Bede indicated that his choice of a Catholic school was in large part because of the Catholic Church's history of academic freedom and rigour, both of which he admired and thought would be beneficial for his child: "I'm a stodgy, pseudo-intellectual dick. [...]. So, I had this sort of stodgy, maybe snooty, deep-seated thought that [Catholicism's] the tradition that had, sort of, the best chance of producing academic excellence. [...]. I want to sort of foist on my child the possibility of academic excellence."

One participant, however, selected a Catholic high school without any reference to religion. Catherine explained her choice, saying that

[t]he Catholic part actually had nothing to do with it. I would say the cost between [the Catholic high school and the analogous secular independent school] would be [the most important reason] honestly, because the religion component wasn't important to me.

She later indicated that, had the tuition been lower at an analogous secular independent school, she likely would have chosen it over the Catholic school. But, Catherine is an outlier in the data. Janzen's (2002) study of parents with children in independent schools in Manitoba found that 85% were dissatisfied with the level of religious instruction in the public system. Although an analogous question was not asked of participants in this study, they were in overwhelming agreement that religious instruction was a prominent determinant in their decisions.

Theme Two: Intrinsic Considerations in Participant School Choice Decisions

Though most of the participants were in agreement that religion was an important consideration in their choice of school, participants had myriad other reasons for choosing their schools as well. Some of these reasons I call 'intrinsic considerations,' since they are characteristics of the schools in question, rather than characteristics of the participants, their children, or their families or social networks. Neither are they what I call 'extrinsic considerations,' like influences from family and friends, or children's desires (which are discussed later in this chapter).

Academic Considerations. Alongside religion, participants in this study frequently cited a desire for strong academic quality when choosing a Catholic high school. This is consistent with most other studies of Catholic school choice (see especially: Ajuwon & Bradshaw, 2009; Bosetti, 2004; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Card et al., 2008; Guzmán et al., 2012; Kelley & Evans, 2004; Taylor & Mackay, 2008). Janzen's (2002) study of parents with children in independent religious schools in Manitoba found these parents to be uniformly dissatisfied with the academic quality of public schools, though Catholic school parents expressed the least dissatisfaction (and were more likely

to critique the lack of religious instruction in public schools than their perceived lack of academic quality). In general, all parents tend to feel strongly that academic quality is important when choosing a school (Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Kleitz et al., 2000; Long & Toma, 1988; Schneider & Buckley, 2002). At some point in each interview in this study, every participant mentioned the academic quality of the school as being important in their selection, though few seriously criticized the academic quality of public schools. Regarding the academic quality component of her decision, Teresa said that

[w]e wanted [our children] to be challenged. We wanted them to receive support if they need it. We wanted them to have the options that they wanted. The options that we wanted them to have would be options that would provide them with a good basis for a post-secondary education. [...]. So even though there are other high schools that offer more choices in terms of options and clubs, [these two Catholic high schools] had the ones that we thought would be most important.

Some of the participants described their academic choice rationale by contrast with their children's experiences in public schools. Catherine was asked to what degree strong academics were important in her choice and she responded by critiquing the public school system:

[Strong academics are] very important. That's part of, I think, what was frustrating about the public school. The kids would come home, they wouldn't have any homework, they didn't seem challenged. You know, they just sort of seem to do as little as possible. [...]. What we're finding is...like a good example is in English. So while my [child in public school] is two [grades] ahead...my

[child in a Catholic high school] is doing [the same content] next year...it's like [my child's] a year ahead.

Bede waxed philosophical when posed the same question:

It's not so much to me in my own silly mind that I want to impart to [my child] a particular moral ethic or outlook or whatever the words are. It is that I want [my child] to have somehow fostered...a love of philosophy, a love of literature, of intellectual inquiry and...the thing I admire absolutely most about [Catholic schools] is that they are up for a challenge. [...]. They're not interested in just advocating or dictating. They're interested in inquiring. So I think that gives my kid a fighting chance at being an empathetic, thinking, well-voting person. [...]. And [they're] very dear to me, the people who work [at my child's school]. I find them to have been selected excellently. I don't know, maybe randomly, maybe it just worked out that way, but I find [my child's school] to have a cohort of teachers that is extraordinary. [...]. I've been around academic excellence for the bulk of my life, and I find all of that [at my child's school].

When asked, most of the participants did not express strident disapproval with the academic quality of the public school system, which Janzen (2002) also found. Instead, most simply said they wanted the focus of their child's education to be more academic (in whatever sense they individually defined that term). Many participants also commented that, since the academic nature of the Catholic high schools was commonly known, discovering that quality was simple. It also meant that their children were likely to be surrounded by other children with similar academic capabilities and motivations, thus

minimizing external distractions and helping to encourage their children to remain academically focused (another selection factor that will be addressed later).

A few participants, however, did express more candidly their displeasure with the public school system in terms its academic quality. Catherine, for instance, discussed a number of difficulties that her elder child—who was enrolled in a public school—was having with academics, and expressed displeasure over the lack of accountability that the teachers and school took when asked to address these issues. Robert had similar concerns, since a few of his older children had learning difficulties that went unaddressed in the public system. Hildegard, too, had special insight into public education. Her husband is employed in a Manitoba public school division, and his impression was that the academic quality there was severely lacking.

Several participants mentioned that preparation for post-secondary study was important to their academic decision making, reflecting previous studies (Bosetti, 2004; Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Taylor & Mackay, 2008). Robert mentioned his impression of students who had gone to independent schools when he was a university student: “The students that had gone to private school walked in, had the study skills, didn’t have to learn them, didn’t have to develop them...and they were so ahead of everybody else.” Agnes offered a similar appraisal of her public school experience and how it influenced her decision making: “I went to public school. I felt like I had an excellent education, but I did not feel like I was properly prepared for university...” Indeed, a few of the participants based their impression of the Catholic high schools’ academic quality more on their own experiences elsewhere than on any information gathering. That being said, several participants did indicate that their impressions of the academic quality of the

school were gleaned from research, notably attendance at open houses (especially ones that offered interactions with current students), internet research, and interaction with family or friends who were current students or alumni of the school in question. Those participants who spoke with current students or with alumni were in universal agreement that the students or alumni were always extremely positive about their academic experiences (and their experiences in general).

Academic excellence is not solely found at Catholic high schools however, so participants were asked if they explored other schools known for their academic quality. When asked if the academic quality of other schools drove her choice of Catholic schooling, Cecilia said

No, not really. But, it's like buying makeup. You, before you really bite, you read all the reviews. So I was talking to people with kids in Catholic school and people with kids in public school. [Public school's] not really [academically] competitive, but it's not bad. You can build a good life after [going to public school]. But then you don't have that faith.

Mary had similar feelings. She suggested that, when researching high schools for her child, she found that many public schools had excellent academic quality—including several with Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate offerings—which appealed to her. But, “[she] wanted [her] children to have freedom to speak about God.” This general sentiment—that there are many other academically excellent schools in Winnipeg but which lack a religious or moral component—was mentioned by other participants, too, often as a deciding factor between different schools. However, there were two counterpoints to this view.

For instance, Albert had three children attend the same Catholic high school (two of whom have since graduated). He said that, although the quality of education has improved, when his first child attended “the culture [of the school] was overly focused on the Catholicism instead of the academic quality.” Catherine was more uncompromising, indicating that, had the differences in tuition cost not been a barrier, she would have sent her child to the “more exclusive” secular analogue of the Catholic high school she eventually chose. She went on to say that the secular school’s “customer service piece of absolutely meeting the needs of the kids [by creating special courses for them]...is great.”

Perceptions of Other Students and the School Environment. Closely related to the academic quality of the school of choice, many participants noted that they wanted their children to be surrounded by other children for whom academics were a high priority, and who were likely to be academically disciplined and well-behaved. Speaking of her choice of school, Teresa hoped

[t]here wouldn’t be distractions that kids who aren’t headed in a post-secondary direction [might cause]. There would be distractions, certainly, as at every school...that’s here and there and everywhere else, too. But hopefully it would be dealt with from a disciplinary kind of weight quickly and efficiently. [...]. Just a real clear idea of expectations and to be with other kids who have signed up on the same team.

Hildegard had similar thoughts. As previously discussed, she mentioned that her husband worked for a public school division in Manitoba and that, having seen the environment of the schools, he preferred their child to be elsewhere. She did not elaborate much on what elements of the public school environment she and her husband took issue with, but she

did later indicate a desire for a more academic focus and a more structured environment. Albert was similarly dissatisfied with the public school's "...general culture [and] the quality of education." Albert's concerns were not relegated to the public school system; he had similar concerns about another, non-Catholic independent school that he explored:

We realized that it seemed like any of our friends who had kids who were having challenges would send them to [a particular non-Catholic independent school]. So it was a school that was known as a private school that was with strict rules and high levels of supervision. And if your kid was struggling behaviourally or academically, that was a good school to send them to. [...]. I think [a school's] like a sports team. If you're with kids who are all focused on wanting to do well, you will do better than if you're with kids who kind of go "Ahh, school doesn't matter, you know, it's not important to me."

Catherine, as previously mentioned, expressed a similar sentiment, though with less nuance. She wanted to send her child to an analogous secular independent school which she called "more exclusive," but tuition was prohibitive. Though she did not elaborate, it is clear that since a motivator in her decision was exclusivity, that would certainly include a clientele of students who are focused on academics in the same way she desired for her own children.

Joan was concerned about the other students also, but not for primarily academic reasons. Joan's child was bullied in elementary and middle school, and she hoped that the quality of students and a rigorous disciplinary system in her choice school would help mitigate any further bullying of her child.

The perception that Catholic schools tend to be more disciplined—academically and otherwise—than other schools is often found in literature (Berends, 2015; Guzmán et al., 2012; Kelley & Evans, 2004). That being said, most of the participants were concerned about the academic discipline of the schools, rather than social discipline.

Financial Considerations. Although the cost of tuition was something that each of the participants considered during their choice, only a few participants indicated that the cost of their choice school—or the cost of any other school—influenced their choice. Instead, most said that the cost of the schools was simply the price to be paid for what they wanted for their children. For instance, Hilary noted that, while finances were a strong consideration for her as a single parent, “[the school] always said that no student would be turned away because of finances, and we did get some financial aid for them to [attend].” However, she did indicate that she would have found the money one way or another, since she was convinced the school was the right place for her children: “You get what you pay for. Truly.”

A few of the participants surveyed did indicate that their decision between different Catholic schools was motivated to a degree by cost, but this was usually tempered by other factors. For instance, Hildegard indicated that the cost differential between two of the Catholic schools to which she could have sent her children was significant. However, she indicated that even if higher tuition costs had not been a deterrent, she would not have changed her choice since she preferred certain other aspects of the school she eventually chose. Similarly, Albert indicated that he was aware of the costs of all of the other possible schools and, although he could have afforded a much more expensive secular school, it “never really appealed.” Leo was also unfazed by the

cost differential between schools. He indicated that he was suspicious of the Catholic identity of one of the schools he could have chosen, and as such, even if tuition costs were less onerous, he would not have chosen the other school. Nevertheless, his children expressed a desire to attend the more expensive Catholic school, in large part because they had friends going. He “explained to [his children] the fees, the structure...you know, [his children] understood that.” But Leo was quick to point out that tuition was not the only motivator for his choice: he said that, in addition to his concerns about its catholicity, the type of students present in the school and whether or not the school was co-educational or single sex were other motivators for his choice. Similarly, the cost differential between schools was also mitigated by distance; the school he eventually chose was considerably closer to his workplace.

Two of the participants indicated that the costs were difficult, but that they received some form of aid. For instance, Joan indicated that her children’s grandparents had established a trust to pay for their education, so they were able to draw funds from that. That said, she also indicated that without the trust they likely would have been able to afford the tuition anyway. Hilary, as previously mentioned, received some aid from the school. But, she split the difference in tuition with her children’s grandparents. She also indicated that she felt a need to give back to the school, so she volunteered a lot of her time with school events. Another participant happened to be employed by one of the schools and indicated that he or she had “entertain[ed] the notion [of sending my child to a Catholic high school], but financially it was never really an option until I was working [there]. But, the moment it became a financial possibility was the moment I embraced the idea.” This same participant did indicate that, given his or her experience working at the

school, he or she would have “tried, probably, [to send my child to this Catholic school]. I [would have] leaned on my parents or something.” When asked if the child would have attended a Catholic high school without tuition remission, the participant indicated that it would have been “very unlikely...and that makes me sad.” The participant also indicated that the barrier of tuition, if removed, would have made the decision immediate in favour of attending the Catholic high school.

Finally, there were two participants who indicated that tuition was a major factor in their choice of Catholic high schools for their children. Agnes said that “if we could have afforded it, to be very honest, [we] would have chosen [a secular independent school] because it was co-ed. [But], there’s no way we could afford that.” She did indicate though that her child preferred the single-sex environment of the Catholic high school she did attend, and that that had an influence on her decision as well. Cecilia looked at the same secular independent school as Agnes, but was able to afford the much higher tuition. But, “then [she] learned that [it] isn’t Catholic,” and so the school was immediately ruled out. Catherine’s approach was the opposite of Cecilia’s: “I would say the cost between [the Catholic high school and the secular independent school] would be [important] honestly, because the religion component isn’t important to me. [...]. I probably would have sent her to [the analogous secular independent school] if it was price comparable.”

The participants in this study tend to stand apart from many larger studies of Catholic school choice that were mentioned in the literature review. Many of these indicated that tuition was a barrier to attending Catholic schools such that more parents would choose them if tuition were mitigated in their decision making (Bosetti, 2004;

Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; DeFiore, 2013; Lankford & Wyckoff, 1992; Miserandino, 2017; Wallace, 1999). Tuition, therefore, stood out as a choice consideration which I expected to be more prominent than it was. Then again, each participant found some means of overcoming the tuition barrier—be it household income, bursaries, or support from extended family—which is itself interesting. Nevertheless, although tuition may have been a barrier for some parents, the subset of parents who participated in this study did not seem to consider tuition a great detriment to their ability to choose (even among those who chose not to disclose their incomes). Obviously had tuition been a serious problem, then these parents would never have been in this study to begin with. That point is made in the literature—especially from the U.S.—which suggests that Catholics are far more likely to choose Catholic schools (or not) for reasons of affordability (Fleming et al., 2015; Ji & Boyatt, 2007; Reichard, 2012). Interestingly, affordability may be the one area in which participant Catherine finds herself consistent with previous studies. For instance, she repeatedly referred to her choice of a Catholic school as being primarily motivated by the tuition differential between it and its secular analogue, and Catholic schools have previously been noted as affordable alternatives to both public schools and more expensive secular independent schools (Bosetti, 2004; Pizarro Milian & Davies, 2017; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004).

Other Intrinsic Considerations. There were a variety of other intrinsic considerations that participants in this study gave for why they made their school choice decisions. As a rule, the responses in this section were not common in the literature review, which was specific to Catholic schools. But, they were found in some of the general texts (like Bosetti & Gereluk, 2016) as being relevant to school choice in general.

Secular goods theory (Pelz & den Dulk, 2018) is a dominant theoretical feature in the next section.

Distance from Home. Participants gave disparate opinions of whether or not distance from home affected their school choice decision. A few participants indicated that they had to go entirely out of their way in order to drop off their children, but that the sacrifice of time was worthwhile. Agnes noted that her husband worked outside of Winnipeg in the opposite direction of the school, but very near to their residence. So her husband “drove half an hour out of his way and came back half an hour. [...]. And then he picked her up again. [...]. So we made a conscious decision that we were going to need to drive two extra hours out of [our] day.” However, Agnes noted that the extra time was an unintended benefit of the choice: “You never lose that time you get with them when you’re in the car and they’re super chatty after school and you hear about their day. And it was super fun when both of them were in the cars. They’re so excited and yammering to each other that you hear everything.” Cecilia was similarly positive about the problem of distance. For her, it was never a deterrent because “it’s four years of investment [in my child’s education].”

Felicity was more practical in her appraisal of the difficulties of distance. She indicated that when her children were younger, distance was a major logistical problem and as such her children went to the most convenient public school. However, once the children were older and more independent, she noted that they were able to take public transit, making distance less of a concern. Another participant, Mary, also indicated that her children use public transit, obviating the problem of distance. Joan noted that having children in two different schools that were far apart was difficult. When questioned about

whether or not that inconvenience influenced her school choice decision, she was succinct and amusing in her reply: “No, because having children’s not convenient.”

Albert spoke of the distance as a significant disincentive and, because his family lived outside of the city, public transit was not an option. Noting that he has three children, all of whom attended the same Catholic high school subsequent to each other, he said

it was going to be ten years of driving from [our home outside of Winnipeg] to [the Catholic high school]. Someday my kids will appreciate how hard that part of the decision was. [...]. And, I mean, it was a big commitment, especially from [my wife], but from me as well. So you get them to and from school every day, [and] [t]heir activities never let up and [they’re] never coming and going at the same time. So that was a significant factor. [...]. You know, you could spend two and a half hours a day in your car.

For Robert, the distance from home was also extremely important. When questioned about whether or not the school’s location would have caused him to change which school his child went to, he answered with an emphatic “Yes.” Leo, similarly, tried to look for a house close to the school that he wanted his children to attend, and eventually settled on one about fifteen minutes away but within range of both the school and his workplace. Hildegard’s choice of Catholic school was also influenced by its location on her way to work, though she only considered Catholic schools nevertheless.

Interestingly, a few participants actively chose Catholic high schools that were a greater distance from home than another Catholic high school. For instance, Teresa indicated that she lived in close proximity to one Catholic high school but gave it no

consideration in her choice. Hilary could also have chosen a Catholic high school closer to her home, but decided on one further away. Mary, in fact, lived quite near to one of the Catholic high schools, but chose one much further from home in spite of its distance. For her, though, there was little inconvenience since she was not working at the time and was able to drive her children; they now take public transit. Other participants indicated that they had significant help from family members (especially grandparents) in ensuring the children made it to and from school such that the choice of school did not impact their own work schedules.

Single-Sex or Co-Educational Schools. A surprising number of participants indicated that the single-sex or co-educational nature of the schools influenced their choice. Catherine was the most insistent, suggesting that her child was being severely bullied by children of the opposite sex. She decided that it was important that her child be in a single-sex environment to mitigate any further bullying. More than that, she had indicated that her own co-educational, secular education had been somewhat negative in that it discouraged females from academia and encouraged them towards traditionally female gender roles and occupations. She thought “[a single-sex] environment was important” because it would allow for fostering of her child’s academic future in an environment where children of her child’s sex were valued and academically encouraged. Albert and Mary were similarly interested in single-sex education for their children, and, for Mary, that influenced her choice between two different Catholic high schools.

A few other participants had the opposite feeling. Bede, for instance, indicated that his wife was concerned about the single-sex environment. Leo and Hildegard both indicated that they wanted their children in co-educational environments. None of the

participants who preferred co-educational environments elaborated much on their reasoning.

Miscellaneous Intrinsic Considerations. Several participants indicated other intrinsic reasons why they chose their particular school but that were specific to them and were not often repeated. For instance, Bede's child found the facilities of the school to be quite impressive, influencing the family's decision: "I'll be crass and say [my child] came [to the school] a couple of times and saw how beautiful the facility was and [my child] was enamoured." A few other participants also mentioned impressive facilities, although it was not generally a significant part of their decision.

Two other participants—Joan and Agnes—seemed to indicate that their choice of Catholic high schools was almost by default because of elementary school choices. Joan noted that the Catholic elementary school nearby had all-day kindergarten and that her child grew to love the structure of the Catholic schools; Hilary also wanted a more structured environment for her child. Agnes was quite a bit more practical in that her child had missed the age cut-off for kindergarten and her catchment public school would not admit her child until the following year. The nearby Catholic elementary school, however, admitted her child, and her child's ongoing Catholic education simply followed from that.

Catherine and Robert were both looking for schools with a higher level of accountability to parents, and their presumption (and subsequent impression) was that an independent school would provide that. Catherine was also interested in the athletic and extracurricular programs offered by the school she chose, but no other participants

mentioned athletics or extracurriculars much in their decision making except as added bonuses over and above their actual reasons for choosing the school.

Finally, a few participants indicated that they were impressed by the general quality of the schools when they attended open houses. Indeed, nearly every participant attended an open house (sometimes multiple, and sometimes at non-Catholic high schools), and frequently the open house became the linchpin for onboarding children into the school choice decision. For instance, Albert, Agnes, Catherine, Cecilia, and Hilary all indicated that, upon visiting their school of choice during its open house, their children were instantly sold on the decision. Largely, they attributed this to an intangible attraction to the facilities and, especially, to interaction with current students who would share their candid opinions of the school (usually their enthusiastic fondness) with the families.

Theme Three: Extrinsic Considerations in Participant School Choice Decisions

This section outlines the extrinsic considerations that influenced participants' school choice decisions.²¹ The two primary extrinsic considerations found in this study are influences by family or friends, and the desires of children to attend a particular school. Neither of these was a feature of Catholic school choice literature in particular, which tended to focus strongly on intrinsic considerations. As with some of the intrinsic considerations, what follows in this section is occasionally discoverable in some of the secular research and is further suggestive of the prominence of secular goods theory as potentially instructive in further research on Catholic school choice.

²¹ Although distance from home could be considered an extrinsic influence in that parents could theoretically choose to move themselves nearer to a school, I included it in the previous section on intrinsic influences since the location of a school is static. Families are more mobile than buildings.

Influences by Family and/or Friends. Many participants indicated that discussions with family or friends often influenced their decision. Usually, alumni and friends were quite supportive of the participants sending their children to a Catholic high school. Family, on the other hand, were sometimes split: usually family who were alumni or who had attended Catholic schools themselves were supportive, but family members without a connection to Catholic schools sometimes expressed disapproval.

Bede's story is illustrative of a variety of these influences. Coming from a fairly conservative Catholic family, he noted that some members of his family blanched when he sent his older children to public schools, especially since he and all of his siblings attended Catholic schools (and because many of his nieces and nephews do or will). He mentioned that "there might have been some side glances...there might have been some back room chatter [among elements of his family]." However, he did indicate that nobody ever expressed a serious disapproval with his selection of public schooling for his older children. Moreover, his parents "were far more prepared for [him sending his older children to public school] than they would have been, say, fifteen years before, with their older grandchildren." Needless to say, even if the family pressure was not explicit, it certainly existed in the family's culture. By contrast, Cecilia's parents were far more explicit in their desire for their grandchildren to have a Catholic education:

[W]hen we immigrated here to Canada, I was pregnant with [my child] and I was looking at the education system, actually, the public school[s]. And when I even brought that up to our parents [they said]: "Don't you dare! You can find the means to pay for a private Catholic school." This is both sets of parents. "We did it for you!"

Among participants who had either attended one of the Catholic schools in this study or another Catholic school, or who had family members that did, the family influence was obvious, though largely passive and cultural. This corresponds strongly with two Australian studies that found a significant effect on Catholic school attendance if the parents had themselves attended Catholic schools (Dearden et al., 2011; Graetz, 1990).

For instance, Teresa noted that she had “truckloads” of family that had gone to the two Catholic high schools attended by her children. So, she noted, attending these schools was “just what we did,” reflective of Bourdieu’s theory of *habitus*. She noted, however, that her father-in-law had serious concerns about his grandchildren attending a Catholic school, in large part due to his own misgivings about organized religion. She noted that his opinion of the school changed after he attended a few school events: “[H]e was completely blown away and was a super huge fan.” Similarly, Felicity indicated a family history of attendance at two of Manitoba’s Catholic high schools. She also indicated that many of her children’s relatives who had attended these schools spoke highly of them for years before her children actually attended, and that those positive anecdotes certainly influenced her decision, as well as those of her children.

In other cases, family members more seriously questioned the decision to attend a Catholic high school. Joan’s parents, for instance, questioned why she would want to pay for school when she could simply have her children attend public schools for free. Joan’s response was clear: “I was like, ‘This is their education! This is the basis for the rest of their life!’”

Several participants (or their children) also had friends who attended or graduated from the school they chose. Catherine's child, for instance, played sports with a number of children who attended one of the Catholic schools, and this was a significant motivator for the family during the decision making process. Hilary was friends with a family who had sent their five children to Catholic high schools in Winnipeg, and she had heard enough good things that she made the decision that her children would attend as well. She also noted that several of the children of that same family had strong social networks that they attributed to attending a Catholic high school; she was hopeful that her children would be able to develop similarly strong networks.

Two participants—Leo and Robert—indicated that their decision was strongly influenced by priests that they knew through regular participation in church life at their respective parishes. Both indicated that the priests had recommended a Catholic high school to them, and both found the priests' opinions to be credible enough in that regard to merit serious consideration. In the same vein, several of the participants indicated that they worked with or otherwise knew people who had children at the schools and who spoke very highly of them.

Hildegard's experience with friends was dissimilar. She knew nobody whose children attended Catholic schools, and received negative responses from her own friends when she made her decision. These friends questioned why she would bother sending her children to an independent school when it teaches precisely the same curriculum as in the public school system. Her response expressed a desire for religious education and academic rigour. As a counterpoint, she also mentioned that there was a strong cultural

pressure from her ethnic community to attend Catholic schools, influencing her choice somewhat.

Child Involvement in School Choice Decisions. For most of the participants in the study, their children were partners in the decision of which school to attend. The degree to which children were consulted varied, though most of the participants agreed that, had their children mounted serious opposition to the Catholic high school that they chose, they likely would have relented and chosen a different school.

Catherine was perhaps the most liberal in including her child in the process of choosing a school. She indicated that her child was “an equal partner” in the decision-making process, as did Hilary. Albert felt similarly: “If there’d ever been a big problem with [my children at their school], they would have moved. We weren’t forcing them to go.” A few participants were even more laissez-faire with their children. Agnes was clear that her child made the choice, and she simply helped her child gather information on the schools in which he or she was interested. Rather similarly, Joan indicated the primary interest in a Catholic high school came from her child, who had, two years before high school, decided to convert to Catholicism. Felicity’s experience was similar in that her children had multiple family members who had attended Catholic school:

[W]e never told the kids they had to [attend a Catholic high school]. Certainly it was encouraged when they saw other family members [who had attended], which made it easier for them to make that decision. But I would say that if they had a strong opposition for whatever reason, we would have certainly listened to them and come up with other options.

A few participants were less deferential to their children's opinions. Mary indicated that her children were presented with the option to go to Catholic school, and they could choose between them to a degree. However, her strong feelings about aspects of one of the schools meant that she "pushed them, actually. They [were not] happy. I just pushed them through and now [one's] graduating now; she doesn't have much regrets." Leo had similarly made the decision on behalf of his children, and although they were able to express their opinion and desires, the choice ultimately rested with him. Hildegard was similarly clear that negotiations occurred, but that the decision to attend a Catholic school was made long before her child was old enough to express an opinion. Finally, Cecilia and her husband had also already decided that their child would be attending Catholic school. When asked what would have occurred had their child raised any objection to this, she replied: "We'd probably talk about it, but [my child] would still be going."

Conclusion

The literature review (chapter two) suggested that there were three commonly recurring reasons why parents choose Catholic schools: religious instruction, academic strength, and affordability. For participants in this study, two of those three were clearly important. They desired strong religious instruction for their children, as evidenced by 12 of 13 parents identifying it straightaway when asked generally for the reasons for their choice. The academic quality of the school was of similar importance. Affordability, however, seemed not to be. Perhaps this is because the majority of parents wanted a strong academic and religious ethos and were willing to pay for it. More likely, though, is

that parents who want a Catholic education but cannot afford one simple could not have participated in this study.

Participants also identified a few other reasons for their decisions, notably the influence of family and friends, the school's facilities, and whether or not the school was co-educational or single-sex. Children's opinions were also valued among the participants.

And who participated in this study? The majority (11 of 13) were Catholic, but they were all Christians. This correlates strongly with research suggesting that people who are themselves religious are likely to choose religious schools for their children. The majority (7 of 13) also attended Catholic schools, and a further three attended other independent schools. The participants were also uniformly educated to at least the bachelor's degree level, and all but one were in stable, long-term marriages; either of these might also explain participants having higher than average household incomes for Winnipeg. Finally, nearly one-third of the participants were immigrants to Canada.

The study also suggests that three theories—underpinned by Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*—may help to explain Catholic school choice among parents. Social identity theory suggests that parents might be hoping to reproduce elements of their own religious identities in their children. But some Catholic parents are not themselves practicing, so why choose to replicate a faith in one's children that one does not fully embrace? Davie's (2007) theory of vicarious religion suggests that perhaps these parents might be exercising their own faiths vicariously, by way of their children. Yet neither of these theories account for why non-Catholics might choose Catholic schools. These parents may fit secular goods theory, which supposes that some choose Catholic schools for their

secular (that is, non-religious) benefits, like strong academics or excellent facilities.

Whatever their reasoning, parents seems to be making thoughtful decisions when selecting Winnipeg's Catholic schools.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

Catholic schools in Canada—especially outside of Alberta and Ontario—are understudied, at least in recent literature. Certainly they are found within broader areas of educational research, but rarely are they specifically illuminated, especially in school choice literature. They are not ignored, of course, since they are numerous in some places. But they often find themselves aggregated with other schools either as ‘public’ or ‘independent,’ depending on which province is being discussed. Perhaps this is the problem: since Catholic schools are difficult to extract from larger school populations, they simply aren’t. But, in fact, there seems to be little research about independent schools as a whole in Canada. I suggest that more research be done about Catholic school choice in Canada in the future, and this thesis has attempted to fill something of that void. Specifically, it sought to answer the question of why parents choose independent Catholic high schools in Manitoba. It asked who these people are, and what these people want. The scope of this question is narrow, but it is a start.

Major Contributions

This thesis has contributed to educational research in several ways. One significant contribution of this thesis is that it has provided an experiential basis for future research on Catholic school choice in both Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada. Since so little research on the subject had been done previously, this thesis depended heavily on more general school choice literature, or literature from outside of Canada. This study will hopefully serve as a basis for further research having findings common to other literature, and having discovered other Catholic school choice considerations that may not have been readily apparent.

The study also took a unique theoretical approach, especially building on Rymarz's (2013) application of Davie's (2007) theory of vicarious religion to choice of Catholic schools in Canada. Vicarious religion was originally designed to explain continued declarations of religious affiliation among populations who are otherwise religiously inactive. Rymarz (2013) suggested that vicarious religion could be explanatory for parental behaviours in Australian and Canadian Catholic school choice, though this is the first study (as far as I know) that used vicarious religion as a theoretical basis for conducting school choice research. I suspect that Davie's (2007) theory may prove illustrative for religious school choice studies going forward and hope more research will be done in that regard.

More generally, the study also added knowledge to the field of school choice research for Canada, which is itself somewhat understudied. It is especially lacking in Manitoba, where the school choice considerations of parents seem to be unclear despite liberal school choice policies.

Limitations of the Study

The key limitations of this study are its scope and generalizability. In terms of scope, the study included only 13 participants. Though this number is fairly average for a master's thesis, 13 participants represent only a small proportion of the parents who have children enrolled in Manitoba's Catholic high schools. And, more than that, the fact that one of the schools (St Boniface Diocesan High School) did not respond to the invitation to participate means that the perspectives presented in the previous chapter may not reflect the beliefs of at least 12% of those same parents. While this is not a huge deficit, perspectives from these parents would have been particularly illuminating because of the

school's unique characteristics (such as its relative isolation as the only Catholic high school on the east side of the Red River, its comparatively lower tuition, and its status as the only Catholic high school in the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface).

The study is also not generalizable, and for a variety of reasons. First, and as previously mentioned, the study contains relatively few participants. So, even though the study has good internal credibility (in that it has objectively reported participant responses), these responses cannot be said to represent the position of all (or even most) of the parents who have children in Manitoba's Catholic high schools. Further still, the participants in this study tended to have relatively similar demographic backgrounds. For instance, all of the participants who disclosed their incomes were above the median household income in Winnipeg, and others who did not disclose the specific dollar value of their household income uniformly indicated ranges well above the median income, too. There were, therefore, no voices from parents for whom paying tuition would have been a real strain on family resources. Similarly, nearly all of the parents in the study were in long-term marriages, indicating some degree of family stability and also indicating the probability of higher household income. The one single parent who participated in this study received some financial supports from her school of choice, but she was the only parent who was able to give information in regards to that particular circumstance. All of the participants in this study were also university educated, and several indicated an excitement at the prospect of participating in a research project of this kind. It is unclear what reasons non-university educated parents in Manitoba have for making the choice in favour of Catholic high schools for their children. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, every one of the participants in this study were Christian, and all but two Catholic. There

are many parents who have children in Catholic schools who are not Catholic or even Christian. Unfortunately, none of their voices are heard in this thesis.

Nevertheless, although many of the parents in this study formed homogenous subgroups, the literature does show that Catholics—even nominal ones—are more likely to select Catholic schools for their children (see, for instance, Ajuwon & Bradshaw, 2009; Anderson, 1988; Cohen-Zada & Sander, 2008, among countless others). So, too, do university-educated parents (Davies & Aurini, 2011; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Ogawa & Dutton, 1997), and parents with above average incomes (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). Since these characteristics have been found in many other studies, it does indicate a measure of homogeneity across other studies of Catholic schools more generally.

Despite findings similar to other studies, there is a second reason why this study is not particularly generalizable: school choice schemes in Manitoba are relatively unique. The province partially funds all of Manitoba's Catholic schools meaning that the tuitions they charge can be correspondingly lower than they might be elsewhere (in the United States, for instance). This circumstance exists in few other jurisdictions (though there are comparable analogues in British Columbia, Quebec, and throughout Australia). Furthermore, all of Manitoba's Catholic high schools are located in Winnipeg, and they are quite centrally located. Although that makes choice of Catholic high schools in Winnipeg significantly less constrained, it also means that over a third of Manitobans who live outside of the Winnipeg metropolitan region do not even have the option of selecting a Catholic high school. In other jurisdictions with Catholic schools, the schools

tend to be more uniformly distributed and therefore accessible to a higher number of people.

Another limitation of this study is my position as an ‘insider’ in one of the participating schools. Insider research can have a number of drawbacks. Among these are a potential for lack of objectivity, difficulties with confidentiality, and discrete knowledge of the schools in question (Toy-Cronin, 2019). Perhaps most crucially, any parents who knew me in advance might have had pre-conceived notions of my own positions on the questions that I asked and could have tailored their responses accordingly. In order to eliminate some of these potential problems, the research design ensured that I did not interview any parents of students with whom I may have had a conflict of interest. In fact, I excluded two potential participants because I was currently teaching their children. In the end, I did interview two parents of students whom I had previously taught (and who had since graduated), but those parents were sharing opinions about their other children, neither of whom I knew. Further, I would not say that I knew these parents in any meaningful way, nor they me. And, if they did have preconceptions about my beliefs, that did not come through to me during the research process; their responses seemed candid.

On the whole, despite its limitations, I think this study has provided a good starting point for further research about why parents continue to choose Manitoba’s Catholic schools. And even absent that research presently, I suspect that a variety of stakeholders would benefit from even this initial study as a means of beginning to understand a significant feature of Manitoba’s educational landscape.

Implications for Stakeholders

The very existence of Catholic schools alters the fabric of education in any jurisdiction, and that is true enough in Manitoba. Knowing why families are choosing Catholic schools over alternatives would be useful for a number of different stakeholders like the government, public schools, secular independent schools, other religious schools, and other Catholic schools. It also has benefits for other researchers, for whom some groundwork is already done.

Government

The government might benefit from this study, perhaps because Manitoba has an already permissive school choice scheme and understanding its workings—even at so limited a level—is inherently valuable. For one, Manitoba’s Catholic schools enrol a significant number of students (about 5200 in 2019-2020) (Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). All of these schools are in Winnipeg, and they constitute the seventh largest school division in the city (and a larger division than all but three of the divisions outside of it). And although Catholic schools receive partial funding from the provincial government, parents supplement this funding with tuition while paying the same proportion of school taxes as any other person in Manitoba. Catholic schools also provide their own infrastructures, and they are not eligible for government funding to supplement or maintain them. Thus, Catholic schools provide a tangible benefit to the province, easing the real cost of some 5200 students, and eliminating the upkeep costs of 18 schools.

The benefit to the government runs deeper than the ledger, however. Knowing why parents choose Catholic schools should help the government understand any

deficiencies in the public school system. For instance, participants in this study indicated almost to a person that they wanted religious education for their children. Although a mechanism for religious instruction exists in current legislation, it can be hard for parents to initiate. Furthermore, there is a perception among some participants in this study that Catholic schools are academically superior to public ones. Is there truth to that? If so, perhaps the government might like to ameliorate the quality of education in the public system. If not, perhaps the government would like to re-emphasize the quality of its public system. If the government does not know why this perception exists, maybe it should.

If the government's policy is to support choice in education, it has a duty to understand why individuals are drawn to different schools. This research is a starting point, but there is also an absence of research about any of Manitoba's other independent schools. For that matter, one wonders what research there is about parental perceptions of any of Manitoba's schools. I could find very little indeed.

Public Schools

For public schools, Catholic schools provide a "viable exit option" (Smith & Meier, 1995, p. 56): they provide things that some parents want, but which public schools do not provide. Indeed, some research suggests that more parents would opt for Catholic schooling had they the ability or resources to choose. Thus, public schools may wish to ask themselves certain questions about whether or not they are meeting the needs of all of their constituent populations. Perhaps I can offer an answer that the research suggests to me: it should not be acceptable to public school boards to be simply adequate. Yet, this research suggests that there are things they are not providing.

It is true that public school boards may find religious schooling a hard sell to some of the public. But, other provinces manage it quite successfully (even if there are occasional complaints), and there is even a very successful Catholic school that is fully-funded and public in Manitoba: St Augustine's School in Brandon School Division. Its existence, though anomalous, shows a means by which public school boards might viably regain some of the attrition they lose to independent Catholic schools in Manitoba.

There is also the question of academic excellence. Research about the academic benefits of Catholic schooling (so-called 'Catholic School Effects' (CSEs)) abounds, though whether or not these benefits exist seems to depend on the researcher's creativity with data.²² Nevertheless, we can be confident that CSEs are at least perceived to exist, and that may cause dissatisfaction with the academic quality of the public school system. Any perceived dissatisfaction likely runs deeper than the 5200 families in Catholic schools in Manitoba (who were, it must be said, not especially dissatisfied to begin with), but there are many who have no choice but the public school system by virtue of either where they live or how much money they make.

Of course, all of this suggests that public schools believe themselves to be in competition with independent schools. And though I do not know, I doubt this to be the case. But even if it is, knowing what other families are looking for, what drives them away from the public system, cannot but be useful. If it helps public schools align their programming in any way that either stems attrition or recovers a student that had gone, would that not be beneficial?

Secular Independent Schools

²² For a list of studies on CSEs, see footnote 12 on page 41.

Even if public schools do not consider themselves in competition with independent schools, certainly the reverse is not true. Independent schools have an existential need to attract students, and that begins with understanding the behaviour of those who make school choice decisions. For secular independent schools, there may not be much in the way of revelation from this research: continue to emphasize strong academic quality. This would be the primary differentiation that they can draw not only between themselves and the public schools with which they compete, but also other independent schools, Catholic or otherwise. They should also focus on other value-added components, like their facilities and extracurricular offerings. Though these constituted only a minor part of what Catholic school parents found appealing, secular schools are not competing with religion. Therefore, an emphasis on anything beyond academics that is itself a secular good should be emphasized, since parents are not likely seeking to reproduce religious capital at a secular school.

Other Religious Schools

But parents *do* seem to want to reproduce religious capital via religious schools. And doubtless this desire extends beyond Catholic school parents. Though not perfectly analogous, the experience of these parents—many of whom are only practicing their religions tangentially—suggests that other ‘secularized’ religious parents might be keen to do the same. Research agrees, suggesting that even vaguely religious parents are far more likely to choose religious schools. Perhaps it is merely because of their comfort with religion, but regardless, it is clear that religious schools should be prominently emphasizing their religious characteristics. And, though academic excellence is certainly an important part of parental choice when opting to leave the public system, it can be

found in secular independent schools. What secular schools cannot offer—by definition—is religion.

But to what degree religion should be emphasized is unclear. Obviously, the participants in this study were comfortable with Catholicism. But what of a non-Christian or an irreligious family choosing between a secular and religious school? An overemphasis on religion might cause alienation, and unfortunately there were no non-Christian or irreligious participants in this study who could discuss their experiences. The question, then, becomes one of further research: are non-Christian or irreligious families looking seriously at religious schools? This study cannot suggest an answer, populated as it was exclusively by Christians.

Other Catholic Schools

Perhaps the group that stands to gain the most from this study are other Catholic schools. Though the study says very little about non-Christians choosing Catholic schools, it does provide detail on these schools' base clientele. Indeed, it would suggest that many parents are using religion as their choice factor between a Catholic independent school and a secular one, and that even non-practicing Catholics are looking for a religious component in their children's educations. Religious and moral education should therefore be emphasized. Catholic schools should also continue to emphasize their strong academic characters, which participants also found important. Strong alumni networks are important, too, since many families commented that they had friends or relatives that had attended a Catholic school and recommended it.

A number of participants also commented on their selections of Manitoba's Catholic elementary schools, and it seems that the decision either for or against Catholic

schooling seems to be happening in elementary school rather than at the high school level. Many parents commented that they began exploring Catholic independent schools at the kindergarten level, and that it was a natural progression to continue with Catholic education for high school. This suggests that Catholic elementary schools are acting as feeder schools for Manitoba's Catholic high schools, and that high schools with long-term marketing strategies should pay attention to what parents are looking for even at the elementary school level, perhaps even considering stronger partnerships with these Catholic elementaries. One wonders what percentage of Catholic high school students went to Catholic elementary schools, and what percentage to secular schools; Catholic high schools doubtless find it easier to market themselves within Catholic elementary schools than secular ones. So, for each student that chooses a secular elementary education, Catholic high schools may be missing a student from whom they might otherwise have received an application.

Recommendations for Further Research and Conclusion

While this study provides some interesting insights, it has produced more questions than it has answered. At the most basic level, there is a need for more research into Catholic education in Canada. The literature about Catholic schooling in Canada is dominated by the provincial boards in Alberta and Ontario, but even then it is rarely specific to the Catholic schools themselves. Rather, the studies are usually part of larger cross-sectional analyses of things not specific to Catholic education. While these studies are important, they ignore a significant quality about the nature of the schools being studied: their catholicity. Even the most secular Catholic public schools have qualities that separate them from the least secular public ones. We cannot be so quick to assume

that they can easily grouped, or, when Catholic schools are disaggregated, that simply appending the word ‘Catholic’ to a particular portion of data is illustrative enough of the difference. This bespeaks the most significant topic for further research: we have to ask deep questions about the role of Catholic education in Canada. Referring to it as simply an element of the larger educational landscape of Canada is not sufficient. But those philosophical questions must, for now, give way to more practical ones.

First, and at the highest level of practicality, why are non-Catholic families opting out of secular education and towards Catholic education in Canada? In provinces where Catholic schools are fully-funded, is the choice for religious and/or cultural reasons? Do Catholic school effects exist? Second, are Catholics—non-practicing or otherwise—choosing Catholic schools to exercise their own religious beliefs vicariously and therefore build some kind of social or religious capital?

In provinces where Catholic schools are publicly funded, are they chosen for convenience because they are everywhere? Why are non-Catholic families opting for Catholic schools in some cases, especially if they have to pay tuition? Why will families—even Catholic ones—choose Catholic schools that are geographically inconvenient? Why might an otherwise secular family choose a school whose ethos may be, in some ways, at odds with theirs?

And what about the parents choosing these schools? Did they attend Catholic schools? Are most of them highly educated, or is university education associated primarily with choosing independent schools over public ones, with the Catholic element being merely an ancillary consideration? Is enrolment in Catholic schools more or less frequent among members of certain ethnic or linguistic groups? What about among

immigrants? Is access to choice of Catholic schools (or any school choice, for that matter) offered in an equal way to Canada's First Nations communities?

And though this thesis was able to approach many of the questions above, it only began to address *how* people are choosing Catholic schools. What kinds of social networks exist that affect choice of Catholic schools, and to what degree is choice of Catholic schools associated with socio-economic status beyond household income and education? How are parents gathering information in other ways? Are some families disenfranchised from the very act of choosing if they lack the appropriate social networks?

Assuming researchers find these questions engaging, who should they ask? One of the primary limitations of this study is its size, and future researchers will need to expand their scopes, asking larger numbers of participants these questions. At the same time, researchers must continue to account for the differences in how Catholic education is managed across this country, since constitutional compromises mean that it is different in nearly every province. This does make a nationwide survey a difficult proposition—though not an impossible one—for a researcher sufficiently motivated. Will that researcher come along? That is an entirely different question.

In any field of inquiry, there are a never-ending list of questions that could be researched, and exploring Catholic education in Canada is no different. This thesis has explored a narrow area of inquiry: which parents choose Winnipeg's independent Catholic high schools for their children, and what reasons do they have for doing so? This thesis has begun to answer these questions, and the discussion herein has provided insights into why parents—especially Catholic ones from relatively affluent

backgrounds—continue to choose Catholic schools in an era of declining religiosity. My hope is that this thesis might be a launching point for further research about the place of Catholic schools in Canada. Here endeth the lesson.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval Certificate



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Research Ethics
and Compliance

Human Ethics
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3T 2N2
Phone +204-474-7122
Email: humanethics@umanitoba.ca

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

TO: Tyler Kelsch (Advisor: Ee-Seul Yoon)
Principal Investigator

FROM: Zana Lutfiyya, Chair
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: Protocol #E2019:083 (HS23196)
Parental Choice of Catholic High Schools in Manitoba: An Interview-Based Qualitative Research Study

Effective: October 17, 2019

Expiry: October 17, 2020

Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) has reviewed and approved the above research. ENREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the application only.
2. Any modification to the research or research materials must be submitted to ENREB for approval before implementation.
3. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to ENREB as soon as possible.
4. This approval is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
5. A Study Closure form must be submitted to ENREB when the research is complete or terminated.
6. The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

Funded Protocols:

- Please e-mail a copy of this Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer at researchgrants@umanitoba.ca

Appendix B: Letter to Principals

UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

[Date]

Dear [Principal's Name]:

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education. I am presently working on a master's degree in educational administration. In general, my research interests relate to Catholic schools.

You are receiving this letter because I am seeking to interview parents who currently have child(ren) enrolled in Manitoba's Catholic high schools. I am hoping to interview them to provide data for my master's thesis entitled *Parental Choice of Catholic High Schools in Manitoba: An Interview-Based Qualitative Research Study*. The purpose of this study is to explore why some parents choose Manitoba's Catholic high schools. I also hope to identify some socioeconomic characteristics of these parents, and to determine to what degree academic, religious, and financial considerations influence their school choice decisions. I anticipate the outcome of this research being useful to a variety of stakeholders, but especially to Catholic schools. I am happy to share the results of this research project with you when they become available.

In order to gain access to the participants that I require for this study, I am asking for your school to participate in the recruitment process. Attached to this letter you will find another letter inviting parents to participate in this study. If you are able, I would ask that you distribute that letter to parents of your students in grades 9-12.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba's Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (Protocol #E2019:083). If you have any questions, please contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca, or Dr Ee-Seul Yoon at 204-474-6109.

If you could please respond to this letter no later than [date] either confirming or declining your school's participation, I would greatly appreciate it. Or, if you have any questions about any part of this study, please let me know.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Tyler Kelsch

umkelsct@myumanitoba.ca

Graduate Student

Faculty of Education

University of Manitoba

Appendix C: Participant Letter



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

[Date]

Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Dear Prospective Participant:

You are receiving this letter because I am seeking between 12-15 parents who currently have children enrolled in independent Catholic high schools in Manitoba.

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Education. I am interested in why parents choose Manitoba's independent Catholic high schools for their children. More specifically, I am hoping to examine certain socioeconomic characteristics of these parents, and to what degree academic, religious, and financial concerns influence their decisions.

Participants will be selected based on the order that they volunteer until 15 participants have been found. If you agree to participate, the study will consist of an audio-recorded personal interview lasting approximately one hour (but no more than 90 minutes). The interview will occur at a location convenient to you. After the interview, as I am analyzing data, you will also be asked to verify that my analysis of the data you have provided is accurate. This latter step will occur by email and should take no more than an hour.

For ethical reasons, if, at the time of this study, I teach your child(ren) at this school or at any other, or if, at the time of this study, I supervise your child(ren) in any extracurricular program, then you cannot volunteer to participate in this study. If you are unsure whether your participation in this research project will negatively affect you or your child(ren), then please do not volunteer to participate in this study. Similarly, parents of students at the school where the researcher works (St Paul's High School) should feel no obligation to participate simply by virtue of this relationship; participation is strictly voluntary. There are absolutely no repercussions or disadvantages to anyone for not participating.

Even if you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time before the data analysis process begins (approximately December 2019), and any information I have collected from you will be excluded from my findings. I will be aware of your identity throughout the study, but your anonymity will be maintained

through the use of pseudonyms and/or general descriptors when the results are made public. Similarly, any references that you make to your children or the school they attend will be anonymized such that they cannot identify you or your children personally.

Research data containing your name will be kept in the strictest confidentiality: written and audio files will be encrypted and stored on password-protected computers to which only I have access. The data you provide will be destroyed (files securely deleted) at the completion of this research (approximately October 2020).

The results of the study will be made public upon completion of this research project. You are welcome to receive a summary of the results when they are made public. Data collected during this study may also be used by the researcher in journal articles or conference presentations at a later date.

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research project.

I hope that you will consider participating in this study. If you are interested in participating, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at the email address below and I will provide you with more information. Remember that you may withdraw your participation at any time.

This research project has been approved by the University of Manitoba's Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (Protocol #E2019:083). If you have any questions, please contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Tyler Kelsch
umkelsct@myumanitoba.ca
Graduate Student
Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Informed Consent Form

Research Project Title:	Parental Choice of Catholic High Schools in Manitoba: An Interview-Based Qualitative Research Study
Researcher:	Tyler Kelsch Graduate Student, Faculty of Education University of Manitoba 204-XXX-XXXX umkelsct@myumanitoba.ca
Research Supervisor:	Ee-Seul Yoon, Ph.D. Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education University of Manitoba 204-474-6109 ee-seul.yoon@umanitoba.ca

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I am a graduate student in the Master of Education program in the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Education. In general, my research interests relate to Catholic schools. The purpose of this particular study is to understand why parents choose Manitoba's Catholic high schools for their children.

At this time, I am requesting your participation in my study. Participation will involve one audio-recorded interview of approximately one hour (but lasting no longer than 90 minutes). The audio of the interview will be recorded using a phone, after which it will be transferred to a computer. Both the phone and the computer are password protected and only the researcher has access to them. Upon completion of the interview, you and the researcher will debrief so that any questions that you have might be answered, and so that

the researcher can discuss with you next steps in the research process. You will also be asked, at a later date, to confirm the researcher's interpretation of the data that you provide. This should take approximately one hour of your time and will take place by email.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to discontinue your participation at any time before data analysis has begun (approximately December 2019) without penalty or consequence—you simply need to tell the researcher. Should you decide to withdraw from the study before data analysis has begun (approximately December 2019), any information collected about you will be excluded from the data set and removed from unpublished materials.

Although I will know your name at the time of the study, your name will not be used in any published information, and all data containing identifying information—recorded audio, transcripts, field notes, etc.—will be kept strictly confidential, stored in encrypted computer files stored on password-protected devices to which only the researcher and the thesis supervisor will have access. This data will be destroyed (files securely deleted) upon completion of this study, approximately October 2020. In transcripts, field notes, and for the purpose of using the interview data within the results of my study, you will be referred to anonymously or through general descriptors. Furthermore, any references that you make to your child(ren) or the school they attend will be anonymized such that they cannot identify you or your children.

Information you provide during the interview process may be directly quoted in the final publication of the research results except where this would reveal your identity, directly or indirectly. In addition to being used in the researcher's master's thesis, any information you provide may also be using in journal publications or conference presentations at a later date, though your identity will always remain anonymous.

There are minimal risks for participants in this study as the questions discussed during the interview are considered everyday conversation topics. You may benefit from this study as it may help you clarify your own decision making procedures, and those of other parents in Manitoba's Catholic schools.

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

The information you provide will be publicly disseminated upon completion of this research project. However, you will remain anonymous. If you would like a copy of the results of this study upon its completion, you can provide me with your mailing or email address below. Results will be available by approximately October 2020.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you

prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (Protocol #E2019:083). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

If you would like a summary of the results of the study, please provide your mailing or email address below. Results will be available by approximately October 2020.

Email or Mailing Address

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Preamble:

Thank you for your participation in this study. The purpose of this interview is for you to share some of the reasons that you had for choosing a Catholic high school for your child or children. As a result of this study, I hope to identify a variety of reasons that parents have for choosing these schools.

This interview should take approximately one hour, but will not go beyond 90 minutes. In transcriptions of this interview, and in research memos, field notes, and the final publication of results, you will be assigned a pseudonym, and any data you provide will be anonymized such that it cannot be associated with you or your children in any way. At the conclusion of this study, any data you have provided me with will be securely destroyed.

I will begin with questions about your choice of a Catholic high school, and will then move to demographic questions. You are free not to respond to any question that I ask you. Please feel free to ask for clarification at any time.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

1. School Choice Questions

- a. Can you tell me about why you chose a Catholic high school for your child(ren)?
 - i. When did you first consider a Catholic high school for your child(ren)?
 - ii. Were both you and your spouse in agreement about choosing a Catholic high school? If not, can you tell me why?
 - iii. Did you consider any non-Catholic independent high schools for your child(ren) before you settled on a Catholic high school? Public schools? If so, what made you eventually choose a Catholic high school?
 - iv. Did anyone suggest a Catholic high school for your child(ren)? Who?
 - v. Did your child(ren) want to go to this Catholic high school?
 - vi. Did you or any family members or friends go to a Catholic high school?
 - vii. *[If not already answered]* To what degree were academics a consideration in your choice of a Catholic high school for your child(ren)?
 - viii. *[If not already answered]* To what degree was religion a consideration in your choice of a Catholic high school for your child(ren)?

- ix. *[If Catholic]* Are you aware of any formal obligation to send your children to Catholic school?
- x. *[If not already answered]* To what degree were finances a consideration in your choice of a Catholic high school for your child(ren)?
- xi. *[If not already answered]* To what degree was distance from home a consideration in your choice of a Catholic high school for your child(ren)?

2. Demographic Questions

- a. Can you tell me about your family?
 - i. Are you married?
 - ii. How many children do you have?
 - iii. How many are in high school?
 - iv. Do they all attend Catholic schools? If so, have they always attended Catholic schools?
 - v. Do you intend to send your elementary/middle school children to Catholic high school?
- b. What is your level of academic attainment?
 - i. Your spouse's level of academic attainment?
- c. What is your occupation?
 - i. Your spouse's occupation?
 - ii. Can you tell me your approximate household income?
- d. What is your religious affiliation?
 - i. Your spouse's religious affiliation?
 - ii. Can you please describe how you practice your faith?
- e. What is your immigration status in Canada?
 - i. *[If an immigrant]* When did you move to Manitoba, and where from?
 - ii. What is your home language?

3. Comments/Feedback

- a. Do you have any other comments or feedback that you'd like to share before we conclude the interview?

Debrief Script:

This concludes the interview. Do you have any questions?

As I am analyzing the data from your interview, I will email you and ask you to verify my interpretation of your responses is accurate. You may or may not choose to participate in validating my analysis. After that has concluded, I will write up my findings and complete my thesis. At that time, you may receive a copy of the results.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at your convenience. Thanks for participating.