

**UNDERSTANDING THE COLLEGE CHOICE PROCESS OF
CATHOLIC HOMESCHOOLED STUDENTS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process. With the growth of homeschooling in the United States nearly doubling in the past eight years (Cogan, 2010), this study explored a segment of this growing population to give researchers and practitioners a deeper understanding of how they make their college choice.

This study employed a basic, interpretive qualitative methodology. Data were obtained through interviews with 25 Catholic homeschooled students who applied to Benedictine College, a small Catholic liberal arts college in the Midwest. The study was guided by the literature on homeschooling, college choice theory, specifically Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model, and primary influences on college choice, including cultural and social capital.

Several themes emerged through data analysis. First, participants aspired to attend college and had parents who expected them to go to college. Second, parents played an important role in college choice for all participants, but their knowledge of college planning and involvement in the college choice process varied. Participants were influenced by family, friends, faith, academics, finances, campus climate or "fit", and location/size of specific institutions. The students' college choice process was influenced also by the cultural and social contexts in which they interacted, including family values, friends, and the homeschooling environment. Third, homeschooled students in this study relied on the Internet, printed materials, word-of-mouth, and other resources to gather information to conduct their college search. Last, the primary deciding influences affecting the students' final choice of college included cost of attendance, academic program, campus climate, location, and divine intervention.

Homeschooled students in this study navigated the college choice process rather independently. The college choice patterns and timing of their decisions were more similar to, than different from, previous studies on college choice of traditionally-schooled students. However, participants often lacked the information, guidance, and support to navigate easily through the process, emphasizing the importance and need for effective communication with colleges and universities.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The number of homeschooled students, an emerging market of traditional age college students, has grown substantially over the past decade (Apple, 2000; Collom, 2005; Farris & Woodruff, 2000; Reich, 2002; Saunders, 2006). Although it is difficult to determine the exact number, the National Center for Education Statistics (Bielick, 2008) indicates the number of homeschooled students between the ages of 5 and 17 has increased from 800,000 in 1999 to 1,508,000 in 2007. The government data is reflected in the enrollment numbers at Seton Home Study School, a Catholic homeschooling organization and curriculum provider. The school reports since 1999 enrolled families have increased by 50 percent (Drake, 2009).

One of the few estimates related to the college school attendance patterns of homeschooled students comes from the 2009 Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey. HERI indicated that in 2008 there were approximately 11,500 college freshman students who graduated from a home school and subsequently enrolled in one of the 1,693 participating institutions (Pryor et al., 2008, as cited in Cogan, 2010). While homeschooled students do not represent the majority of prospective students, they are a potentially new population of students for many colleges and universities.

Today, homeschooled students are eyed by some colleges as a promising niche market. According to a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, homeschoolers are welcome at nearly all higher education institutions and admissions offices everywhere report increasing numbers of applications from this population (Wasley, 2007). Such is

the case at Benedictine College, a small Catholic liberal arts college located in the Midwest. Over the past few years, a growing number of Catholic homeschooled students from across the nation are choosing to enroll in the college. For instance, first-year homeschooled students increased from 10 students in 2006 to 39 students in 2010 (nearly 10 percent of the freshmen class).

Barr (2002) states tuition is the primary revenue source for most private institutions, especially those with small endowments. Consequently, students' enrollment decisions directly affect the institution's revenue streams. For tuition-driven institutions, such as Benedictine College, it is essential to understand the factors and variables that influence a student's college choice. Although research exists about the college choice process of traditionally-schooled students, there is no existing research concerning the factors influencing homeschooled students' selection of a particular college.

Additionally, innovations in communication technology, such as online social networks, are changing the way students learn about colleges and universities. According to a research study conducted by the National Catholic College Admission Association (National CCAA) and the Lawlor Group, students are seeking unfiltered information, placing a high premium on transparency and demanding that colleges provide relevant and authentic information about their offerings and operations (Mohs & Lawlor, 2009).

As the Vice President of Student Life at Benedictine College, I experience first-hand an increasing volume of e-mail, phone calls, and personal visits to answer many questions originating from on-line blogs and word-of-mouth communications from homeschoolers. In particular, a noticeable increase in activity is coming from parents of

prospective homeschooled students who are inquiring about visitation policies, security, health services, and other student life issues.

This study seeks to understand the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students. In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss the statement of the problem, purpose and research questions, as well as the conceptual framework. I conclude the chapter with the significance of the study and a brief overview of the organization of the study.

Statement of the Problem

College choice has been defined as “the process through which students decide whether and where to go to college” (Bergerson, 2009, p. 2). Studies of college choice became especially popular in the 1980s. Much of what we know about student decision-making is a result of studies conducted with public and private high school students who select four-year residential colleges and universities. However, there is a gap in the literature – a lack of studies that specifically focus on the college choice process of homeschooled students.

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, an investigation of the college choice process of homeschooled students is particularly important today because “thousands of homeschoolers are entering colleges and universities as the homeschool movement is edging toward the mainstream” (Wasley, 2007, p. 1). Legal in all 50 states, homeschooling is considered to be one of the fastest growing segments of K-12 education in the United States (Ray, 2009b).

Gabert, Hale, and Montalvo (1999) suggest the process of choosing a college should be based on obtaining the best information possible and making a selection based

on the data. In the case of a homeschooled student, there may be obstacles to obtaining information and other factors to consider that differ from those of a traditionally-schooled student (e.g., the absence of a high school guidance counselor to assist in the search and financial aid processes) (Mason, 2004). Likewise, since homeschooled students are educated in a nontraditional manner, their college applications are generally different than their traditionally-schooled counterparts (i.e., applications may not include a standard listing of secondary courses, grades, or a high school diploma). Also, college admissions policies for homeschooled students often differ from those of traditionally-schooled students (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b). Admissions counselors need to be ready to meet possible challenges provided by this population (e.g., transcripts, applications, financial aid, etc.), making sure that their institutions are truly an open door for all applicants.

A study of the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students through qualitative research allows students to tell their stories of deciding whether and where to go to college and to give a more complete picture of their individual lives. This information is currently unknown and is needed to assist higher education administrators and the admissions staff in providing helpful information and services to this group of students. For example, with the increasing numbers of homeschooled students who are considering Benedictine College, and tuition from enrollments being crucial for the financial stability of the institution, it is imperative for college personnel to have a clear understanding of the college choice process of this new population of students. This information can aid administrators at the college and similar institutions in devising appropriate marketing and recruiting strategies for such students.

Lastly, the overall depth and breadth of research about homeschooling is limited. Identifying the college choice process of a sample of homeschooled students contributes in a small way to the overall knowledge base regarding homeschooling.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of how Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process. The study is designed to examine college choice from the perspective of homeschooled students who have recently completed the choice process and have matriculated to a college. The results are intended to help guide future research on admissions and recruitment practices in order to most effectively recruit homeschooled students and make the most efficient use of resources. Additionally, the results will provide helpful information of how colleges and universities can assist homeschooled students in making this life-altering decision.

This study is an attempt to contribute to higher education research in the areas of homeschooling and college choice. My hope is that by conducting this study at a small Catholic liberal arts college, I am able to provide insightful information regarding Catholic homeschooled students' college choice that is useful to Benedictine College and like institutions.

Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this study is “How do Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process?” This overarching question leads to five secondary research questions, which are listed below:

1. What influences are most important in the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students?

2. Who is involved in the college decision-making?
3. What role do Catholic homeschooled students' parents play in their college choice process?
4. What is the search process like in terms of resources used?
5. What are the deciding influences affecting Catholic homeschooled students' choice of college?

To address these questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with homeschooled students who applied to Benedictine College for the 2010 fall semester. From a pool of 102 Catholic homeschooled students, I interviewed 15 students who applied and enrolled in Benedictine College and 10 students who applied, but enrolled elsewhere. By comparing the findings between the two groups of students, I wish to contribute to the implications of the study for Benedictine College and other higher education institutions.

Conceptual Frameworks

According to Maxwell (1996), a conceptual framework should address what is the underlying cause of the phenomenon. It should inform the research and provide the lens through which to situate the study. This study is guided by several bodies of knowledge. In particular, the study focuses on the literature on homeschooling, college choice theory, specifically Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model, and influences on college choice, including cultural and social capital.

Characteristics of Homeschooled Students

Homeschooling is a growing trend in the United States. According to Isenberg (2007), the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimate of 1.5 million

homeschoolers (students between the ages of 5 and 17) serves as the official estimate for the United States Department of Education. This latest NCES study conducted in 2007 revealed that parents reported the most important reasons for homeschooling were the desire to provide religious or moral instruction, concern about the school environment, and dissatisfaction with the academic instruction available at other schools (Bielick, 2008).

A number of researchers have evaluated the performance of homeschoolers on various measures and have concluded that homeschooled students seem to be doing well in their K-12 learning environment (Lips & Feinberg, 2008). For instance, researchers have compared the academic performance of homeschoolers to students acquiring a more conventional K-12 education and concluded that homeschooled students performed as well or better than traditionally-schooled students (Basham, 2001; Gray, 1998, Hill, 2000; Jenkins, 1998; Jones, 2002, Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). Additionally, homeschool families typically engage in a wide array of extracurricular activities (i.e., 98 percent report involvement in social activities outside the home at least once per week). These activities, in conjunction with the growing membership and accessibility of homeschool associations, counteract the stereotype of the poorly adjusted homeschool student (Hoeflinger, 2001).

Overall, previous studies find that homeschooled students are academically well-prepared and competitive when they consider their college options (Ashford, 2005; Clemente, 2006; Collom, 2005; Galloway, 1995; Medlin, 2000; Ray, 1997, 2000; Rudner, 1999). Like students who are traditionally-schooled, as homeschooled students

get ready to graduate from high school, they have to make decisions about if, and then where, to continue their education.

College Choice Process

Historically, the college choice process has been framed by three perspectives: sociological, psychological, and economic (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997; Paulsen, 1990). Since college choice is often studied under one of these three paradigms, numerous models have been developed and proposed as ways to understand the process. The three-stage model developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) is the most widely cited and provides a relevant framework in which to analyze the college choice process (Hossler, 1984; Hossler & Gallagher 1987; Hossler et al., 1999).

Hossler and Gallagher's three-stage model (1987) explains the sequencing and timing of a student's college choice. The model uses predisposition, search, and choice to clarify the stages in which students approach college choice. During the first stage, predisposition, which usually occurs between grades 7 and 10, students decide whether or not they want to go to college. The decision to attend college is grounded in this stage. Once students progress to the second stage, search, occurring between grades 10 and 12, they want more information about the schools of interest and seek information via campus visits, Internet searches, or college fairs. This stage lays the groundwork for what the student is looking for in a postsecondary institution (e.g., academic major, size, location, and environment). The third stage, choice, occurring in grades 11 and 12, refers to how students decide on an institution from among those that were considered in the previous stage. Students start with a broad view of higher education opportunities open

to them and refine their perception into the choice of a single institution (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989).

This study uses Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model to explore the college choice process of a sample of Catholic homeschooled students. The model guides this study by providing a framework to help explain the process of choice as students move from one stage to another.

Influences on College Choice

Most researchers agree that the most important influences on college choice are factors related to 1) parents; 2) the students themselves; and 3) institutional characteristics (Hossler et al., 1989). Examples of parental influences are parent income, parent education, and parent encouragement and support. Student characteristics include factors such as socioeconomic class, academic ability, educational aspiration, gender, and ethnicity. Institutional factors are factors such as institutional reputation, location, cost of attendance, academic and non-academic programs, religious affiliation, social atmosphere, and size. These influences of college choice are examples of factors considered by students when making their college choice (Chapman, 1981; Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Hearn, 1991; Litten 1991; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Litten 1991; Stage & Hossler, 1988).

Cultural and Social Capital

The intellectual constructs of cultural and social capital further explain students' choice to attend or not attend college (Hossler et al., 1989). According to Nieto (1999) cultural capital is defined as acquired tastes, values, languages, and educational qualifications that signal belonging to a privileged social and cultural class. Bourdieu

(1979/1984) distinguished among three types of cultural capital: embodied (one's sense of culture, traditions, norms), objectified (things that one owns), and institutionalized (recognition of particular tastes, norms, or values within institutions such as schools).

Bourdieu (1990) defined social capital as actual or potential resources linked to group membership. Winkle-Wagner (2010) suggests social capital (networks, social obligations, and connections) may help one to locate places (or interactions) in a given setting or field. Drawing on these two concepts, McDonough (1991) studied the ways in which status cultures and organizational environments influence the college choice of high school seniors. She found that most students applied to colleges that most closely matched the academic and social atmosphere of the high school they attended.

McDonough (1997) found that “the patterns of students’ aspirations were shaped by the class context of communities, families, and schools in which students lived their daily lives” (p. 151). Parents transmit cultural capital, which leads to social capital by ensuring that their children understand the value of obtaining a college education and the potential economic benefit of such a decision. It is this accumulation of networks and social circles through memberships in privileged institutions that enhance opportunities for those who are given access (McDonough, 1997).

Although there may possibly be a distinct class basis for homeschooling, little research has been conducted regarding the role of cultural and social capital of homeschool families. While current literature does not chronicle how homeschooling influences homeschooled students’ selection of a particular college, their unique pre-college experience may provide grounds for very different perspectives. For instance, does the different role that parents play in homeschooling have a major impact on the

college choice process of these students? What resources are used in the search process in the absence of a high school guidance counselor? How is access to college information obtained? Results from this study are intended to offer viewpoints and stories to help answer these particular questions.

Each of the conceptual frameworks is helpful in understanding the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students. The literature on homeschooling places in perspective the importance of one's demographic characteristics and environment in choosing where to go to college. College choice theory examines the comprehensive process of college choice and offers a theoretical perspective to inform the study. Hossler and Gallagher's college choice model provides a foundation for the study and a framework to analyze the process of choosing a college. The influences on college choice, including cultural and social capital offers insight into specific factors that lead students to choose a particular college. Together these conceptual frameworks allow one to insert the various influences of college choice into the model at the various stages where they provide the most important influence. This integrated model provides a holistic look at the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students.

Significance of the Study

This research study addresses the lack of knowledge about Catholic homeschooled students in the area of college choice. Findings from the study have practical implications for those working in the area of enrollment management particularly at small Catholic liberal arts colleges.

Understanding how Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process can be an important dynamic to study because of its implications on how

effective recruitment can be implemented and what services can be provided to assist these students. As Litten (1982) indicates, “The specification of how the college choice process differs for various types of students is essential if administrators are to make economically efficient decisions regarding student recruitment” (p. 386). This study can serve as a reference for admissions staff to not only see what practices are most influential, but what practices from other institutions could be implemented based on the participants’ responses.

In addition, an understanding of the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students allows higher education administrators to garner information and discover the factors influencing decision-making of this student population. Without this knowledge, administrators and admissions counselors may be missing opportunities that could result in enrolling higher numbers of students. For instance, 102 Catholic homeschooled students applied to Benedictine College for the 2010 fall semester, of which 39 students enrolled in the college and 63 students enrolled elsewhere. Findings from this study may help lead to better marketing strategies in the recruitment of these students as well as overall institutional improvement efforts.

Organization of the Study

What follows is a discussion of homeschooled students and college choice. In the following chapter, I review the literature relevant to the study. This includes an overview of homeschooling, research pertaining to the experiences of homeschooled college students, the process of choosing a college, and primary influences on college choice. In Chapter Three, I describe the methodology used for the study, characteristics of the institutional setting, and the qualitative methods for data collection and analysis.

Limitations of the research are also identified within this chapter. In Chapter Four, I present the results and analyze the themes of the study organized within the stages of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model. Finally, in Chapter Five, I discuss the findings of the study and connect the themes with the current literature. The study concludes with implications for Benedictine College and other higher education institutions and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study attempts to understand the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students. This chapter includes research that provides a solid base of knowledge required for the study. Specifically, since homeschooled students are at the heart of this research, I begin by presenting literature concerning the nature of homeschooling and related college studies. Following this, I present literature relating to the college choice process. The focus of this section is concerned with research on traditionally-schooled students since I found no previous studies regarding the college choice process of homeschooled students.

Overview of Homeschooling in the United States

Throughout history, societies have homeschooled children (Stevens, 2001). Prior to the inception of common schools in the 1870s, homeschooling was prevalent throughout the United States. According to Stevens (2001), for many in colonial America or on the western frontiers of the 19th century, homeschooling was nearly always done for pragmatic reasons (e.g., sparse population and limited resources).

During the early 20th century, states developed public schools with standardized curricula because of concern that all children receive the basic skills necessary to lead a productive life. States began to implement and enforce compulsory school attendance laws, relinquishing parents' responsibility to educate children to the professional teachers of the state (Dailey, 1999). By 1918, all states adopted compulsory school attendance laws and public schools became firmly entrenched in the American landscape (Dailey, 1999). The expansion of public educational systems continued into the 1950s and 1960s.

However, in the 1960s, public school movements began to falter where attempts to racially desegregate schools inspired resistance to the educational authority of the government (Curren, 2009). During the late 1960s, educational turmoil generated considerable questioning about the status, goals, educational practices, and achievements of public schools (Stevens, 2001).

Throughout the 1970s, an ideologically diverse homeschool movement took shape in the United States (Stevens, 2001). Homeschoolers were led by John Holt, who felt that public schools deprived children of their ability to choose their own path of education and Raymond Moore, who felt that public schools undermined the authority of parents. These two men were against the bureaucratization and professionalization of public schools and wanted personalization and decentralization under family control (Collom, 2005). Both Holt and Moore published books that were critical of public schools and travelled the country speaking at community meetings and advocating for homeschooling in legislatures and courts (Gaither, 2009b).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the homeschool movement grew as families organized support groups and networked to lobby for the legalization of homeschooling. In 1980, only three states (i.e., Utah, Ohio and Nevada) recognized parents' rights to educate their children at home (Klicka, 2002). However, with the inception of the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) in 1983, which aided homeschool families by providing affordable legal assistance and lobbying state and federal lawmakers, homeschooling became a legally viable alternative to public education. By 1993, homeschooling was legal in all 50 states with varying degrees of regulation. Each

state defined laws and statutes governing requirements for homeschooling as prescribed by the state's Department of Education (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007).

Currently, there are 6 high regulation states, 19 moderate regulation states, 15 low regulation states, and 10 states that do not require state notification from homeschoolers (Lips & Feinberg, 2009). High regulation states typically require parents to inform their educational authority that they wish to begin to homeschool, maintain compulsory attendance laws, require the homeschool curriculum be approved by the state, conduct periodic visits to the home, administer standardized tests, and require that homeschooling parents be certified teachers. Moderate regulation states typically require parents to send notification and provide test scores and/or professional evaluation of the student's progress. Low regulation states do not require parents to initiate any contact with the state (Basham et al., 2007). Kansas and Missouri are low regulation states; they do not set qualifications for instructors or require student testing or evaluation (Fulton, 2009).

In addition to the above regulations, 35 states mandate the study of particular subjects, 14 states require parents to maintain curriculum records, and 7 states require student work portfolios be kept (Kunzman, 2009). Homeschooling is not regulated by federal law, therefore, homeschool families are excluded from the procedures and provisions outlined in The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Lines, 2003).

According to Collom (2005), the establishment of legal homeschooling rights across the country has facilitated growth in the number of homeschooled children. Bielick (2008) indicates that homeschooling has grown 74 percent since 1999, and 36 percent since 2003 (Bielick, 2008). Although the most recent NCES study indicates approximately 1.5 million children were educated at home in 2007 (Planty et al., 2009),

the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) estimates that between 1.9 million and 2.5 million homeschooled children in the United States during 2008-2009. Despite the estimated differences, both of these reports conclude that the homeschooling population is increasing each year with an estimated growth of 5 to 12 percent per annum over the past few years (NHERI, 2009).

Two recent studies by Ray (2009a, 2011) concur with these latest reports. For instance, in his HSLDA study, the *Progress Report 2009: Homeschool Academic Achievement and Demographics*, Ray (2009a) states there are 2 million homeschooled children in the United States today, with homeschooling growing at around 7 percent per year. Likewise, in his most recent study, Ray (2011) estimates 2.040 million K-12 homeschooled students in the United States in the spring of 2010, with high confidence that the true number lies between 1.734 million and 2.346 million. Evidence gathered during this study, from both state departments of education and private homeschool organizations indicate the homeschool population grew by about 7 percent (or more) from spring of 2007 to spring of 2010.

Gaither (2009b) points out several factors that suggest the number of students being homeschooled will continue to grow. For instance, the continued growth of the number of homeschooling families has led to a proliferation of resources and networks that facilitate homeschooling (e.g., websites, blogs, books, curriculum materials, online learning services, for-profit tutoring providers, and support networks). These resources and networks facilitate collaborative instruction and provide athletic participation and other socialization opportunities.

Additionally, many states have policies that facilitate homeschooling by allowing homeschoolers to participate in various public school activities and attend school part-time. Also, a growing number of states are offering some form of distance and online learning opportunities for homeschooled students. According to Gaither (2008) homeschooling is now big business. In 2001, there were over 500 conventions held around the country, 75 of them attracting over 300 people each. Leading periodicals *Homeschooling Today*, *Practical Homeschooling*, and *Home Education* had a combined circulation of over 350,000 a month. Newsletters, online message boards, and blogs have proliferated significantly as well (Gaither, 2008).

Demographic Characteristics of Homeschooled Students

Generally, research describing the typical homeschool family is limited and does not always agree. Yet some basic characteristics have tended to set the homeschool population apart from the broader population of families with school age children (Lines, 2003). For example, literature has shown that homeschool families tend to be well-educated and economically secure (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006).

More specifically, the latest NCES study, *The Condition of Education 2009*, examined the number and characteristics of homeschooled students in the United States. Based on interviews with parents of 11,994 students aged 5 to 17, findings revealed 2.9 percent of school age children were homeschooled in 2007, up from 1.7 percent in 1999. The majority of homeschooled students (84 percent) received all of their education at home, but some attended school up to 25 hours per week. An estimated 11 percent of homeschooled students were enrolled in public school less than 9 hours per week, and 5 percent were enrolled between 9 and 25 hours per week (Planty et al., 2009). In addition,

the report indicated the ratio of homeschooled boys to girls has shifted significantly in the past decade. In 1999, it was 49 percent boys, 51 percent girls. Today, boys account for only 42 percent; 58 percent are girls (Planty et al., 2009).

The Condition of Education 2009 study reported that more White students were homeschooled than Black or Hispanic students or students from other racial/ethnic groups (i.e., K-12 grade level). White students (77 percent) constituted the majority of homeschooled students (Planty et al., 2009). By comparison, approximately 61 percent of those enrolled in public schools were White (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). White students (3.9 percent) had a higher homeschooling rate than Blacks (0.8 percent) and Hispanics (1.5 percent), but were not measurably different from students from other racial/ethnic groups (3.4 percent) (Planty et al., 2009). Other studies indicate approximately 9 percent of homeschoolers were Black and 5 percent were Hispanic. The percentages of these students were smaller than the percentages of students participating in public schools (16 percent and 17 percent respectively) (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). The study further stated that students in two-parent households made up 89 percent of the homeschooled population. Students in two-parent households with one parent in the labor force made up 54 percent of the homeschooled population (Planty et al., 2009).

Regarding parent income level, students in households earning between \$25,001 and \$75,000 per year had higher rates of homeschooling than their peers from families earning \$25,000 or less a year (Planty et al., 2009). However, homeschooling has grown most sharply for higher-income families. According to the latest NCES figures, in 1999, 63.6 percent of homeschooling families earned less than \$50,000. In 2007, the study showed 60 percent of families earned more than \$50,000 (Toppo, 2009).

Moreover, in 2007, participation in homeschooling was higher among families with at least one parent who had earned a college degree (Lips & Feinberg, 2009). *The Condition of Education 2009* study revealed 6.8 percent of college-educated parents homeschool in 2007, up from 4.9 percent in 1999 (Toppo, 2009). Likewise, the U. S. Census Bureau (2006) reported homeschooling parents have above-average levels of education. Among American parents who homeschool, 75 percent have studied beyond high school compared with 56 percent of parents nationwide (Ray, 2009a).

Finally, Ray (2009b) conducted a study consisting of 11,739 homeschool participants from all 50 states. Results indicated the vast majority of the parents were married (97.9 percent) and families had an average of 3.5 children compared to the general population's average of 2.0 children. The homeschoolers' median family income (\$75,000–79,999) closely mirrored the nationwide median of about \$79,000 for families headed by a married couple with one or more related children under 18. Of the 19.4 percent of homeschool mothers who worked for pay, most of them (84.8 percent) worked part-time (Ray, 2009b). According to this study, parents held a wide variety of religious beliefs, though the majority identified themselves with various denominations of Christianity (i.e., 82.4 percent Protestant, 12.4 percent Roman Catholic, and 0.2 percent Eastern Orthodox).

However, not all homeschool families fit this mold. Kunzman (2009), describing the typical homeschool family, claims the range of demographics, philosophies and practices make such a generalization practically impossible. The researcher states that while most of the homeschool families he studied belong to the conservative Christian

subset, the shape of homeschooling more broadly (i.e., goals, methods and content) varies widely from family to family (p. 313).

Gaither (2009a) agrees that over the last decade all kinds of families have embraced the practice of homeschooling for widely varying reasons. He suggests that along with growing acceptance of homeschooling nationally has come increasing diversification of who homeschools and of what homeschooling actually means (p. 10).

Parental Motivations for Homeschooling

While there is no such thing as a typical homeschooled student or one particular reason that parents chose to homeschool their child, it is important to appreciate the motivations and convictions common in most homeschool families.

Jeub (1994) identified four main reasons parents homeschool: social, familial, academic, and religious. Later NCES studies (i.e., based on 2003 and 2007 data) indicate similar reasons parents homeschool their children. In particular, in 2007, NCES reported the most common reason parents gave for homeschooling was a desire to provide religious or moral instruction (36 percent). This reason was followed by a concern about the school environment (e.g., safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure) (21 percent), dissatisfaction with academic instruction (17 percent), and “other reasons” including family time, finances, travel, and distance (14 percent). Parents of about 7 percent of homeschooled students cited the desire to provide their child with a nontraditional approach to education was the most important reason for homeschooling, and the parents of another 6 percent of students cited a child’s health problems or special needs (Planty et al., 2009).

Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) surveyed 136 parents of homeschooled elementary students and found parental motivations for homeschooling resemble the factors that encourage public school parents to become involved in their children's education. Included in those factors was the fact that "parents believe they have the ability to help their children succeed in school learning and perceive that contextual factors in their lives make involvement or homeschooling possible" (p. 281). The researchers found that homeschooling parents are highly active in their children's education and are choosing to homeschool because they want the best for their children (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

Additionally, while parents choose to homeschool their children for a variety of reasons, one factor that appears to motivate many parents is their desire to have greater influence on molding their children's character and behavior (Medlin, 2000; Ray, 2004). A proposed benefit of homeschooling is that parents, rather than same-aged peers and other adults in society, play the primary role in molding their children's character.

Apart from these general reasons to homeschool children, parental motivations for homeschooling are often divided into two main domains: ideological and pedagogical (Basham, 2001; Knowles, Muchmore, & Spaulding, 1994). Ideological reasons are primarily religious and social. Ideological homeschoolers generally focus on family values issues. They perceive a lack of religion in public schools, desire to educate their children in an environment that enhances the family's religious beliefs, and have safety concerns including moral, physical, mental, and spiritual safety (Knowles, et al., 1994).

Pedagogical homeschoolers are primarily centered on the process of education (Knowles et al., 1994). Pedagogues do not view school and education as the same thing.

They believe that education should occur in a less structured environment and students should engage in more experiential learning (Knowles et al., 1994). Essentially, ideologues choose to homeschool to teach values to their children and strengthen family bonds and pedagogues are parents who are primarily concerned with academic achievement (Van Galen, 1991). However, there are similarities between the two domains, and parents may have reasons to homeschool that include both ideological and pedagogical reasons.

Collom (2005) reviewed 11 studies that explored parental motivations for homeschooling and found four broad categories of motivation: religious reasons, pedagogical reasons, general dissatisfaction with public schools, and family lifestyle reasons, including students with special needs. These findings coincided with those of the NCES studies suggesting homeschoolers are a heterogeneous population with varying and overlapping motivations (Collom, 2005).

Moreover, homeschooling continues to broaden and grow because of the vast array of education options and flexibility it provides for families (Burke, 2009). For instance, many parents with children in time-consuming activities such as music or dance programs, sports, acting, or modeling have turned to homeschooling for its flexible scheduling. Also, parents with children who have special needs of all sorts, from autism to peanut allergies, are finding homeschooling to be a more convenient and comfortable approach for their child's needs (Gaither, 2009b). For a growing number of parents, the motivation to homeschool is not driven centrally by religious or educational ideology (Conlin, 2006, Kingston & Medlin, 2006; Pannacker, 2005).

Although trends toward accommodation of lifestyle and special needs by some homeschoolers will likely continue, research suggests most parents who homeschool still choose this option out of frustration with or protest against formal, institutional schooling. They seek to offer an alternative, usually conservative Christian, worldview to their children by teaching them at home (Gaither, 2009b).

Academic Achievement and Socialization of Homeschooled Students

Each year, the homeschool movement graduates at least 100,000 students (Slatter, 2009). As homeschooling continues to grow as an educational alternative, it is not surprising that homeschooling is gaining increased interest. Often critics question the academic achievement and socialization of homeschooled children and suggest that it is not feasible for students to achieve academically and socially under the tutorship of parents (Apple, 2000; Lubienski, 2000; McMullen, 2002; Reich, 2002).

However, the academic success of homeschooled students is well documented. To date, research indicates that homeschooled students perform as well or better than traditionally-schooled students in all basic subject areas of American education (Ray, 2000, 2009b). Numerous studies have been completed regarding the academic achievement of homeschooled students (Basham, 2001; Basham et al., 2007; Cogan, 2010; Collom, 2005; Farris & Woodruff, 2000; Gray, 1998; Hill, 2000; Jenkins, 1998; Jones, 2002; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; Lyman, 2000; Ray, 2000, 2009b; Rudner, 1999). For example, Rudner's (1999) study of over 20,000 homeschooled students indicated academic excellence that surpassed that of private education, even when the family ranked in the lowest income bracket (i.e., below \$35,000 per year) and the parents did not possess college degrees (Farris & Woodruff, 2000).

A more recent study of 235 homeschool families revealed that gender, amount of instructional time, household income, teaching experience, and race were not statistically associated with student achievement (Collom, 2005). It appeared that whatever academic success can be achieved from homeschooling, applies equally across race, gender, and class lines. Likewise, in a recent study conducted by Cogan (2010) exploring the academic outcomes of homeschooled students who entered a medium-size doctoral institution located in the Midwest, findings revealed that homeschooled students possess higher ACT scores, GPAs and graduation rates when compared to traditionally-educated students. Results from the study revealed that students, at this particular institution, who were homeschooled, earned higher first-year and fourth-year GPAs when controlling for demographic, pre-college, engagement, and first-term academic factors.

In addition, Ray's study (2009b) found homeschoolers scored 34-39 percentile points higher than the norm on standardized achievement tests. Findings from the study indicated that whether or not parents were teacher-certified and the degree to which homeschooling was regulated by state governments had no impact on these scores. Results from this latest study are consistent with 25 years of research showing that, as a group, homeschoolers consistently perform above average academically, even as the numbers and diversity of homeschoolers have grown tremendously over the past 10 years (Ray, 2009b).

Due to the availability of standardized tests, academic achievement for the majority of homeschooled students is easily measured and seems to satisfy the critics. However, the issue of socialization, which usually cannot be completely measured through standardized instruments, is not as easily resolved. Many concerns have been

raised in the literature regarding the practice of homeschooling and the issue of socialization (Romanowski, 2001). For instance, critics have charged that homeschooled children are isolated from the outside world and are socially handicapped (Simmons, 1994, as cited in Romanowski, 2001). Some psychologists have warned that homeschooled children may be unable to get along with others and may experience difficulty entering mainstream life. They may “only hear their parents’ philosophies and have little chance to form their own views,” whereas conventional schools teach “what society as a whole values” (Medlin, 2000, p. 43).

Like the academic performance literature, the socialization literature shows few differences between homeschoolers and those who attend a public or private school (Kingston & Medlin, 2006; McDowell, 2004; Medlin 2000; Ray, 2004; Sekkes, 2004; Stough, 1992). To illustrate, Sekkes (2004) cited various studies that concluded no statistically significant differences between homeschooled students and privately-schooled students in virtually all psychosocial areas tested. The researcher found no statistical significance between homeschooled students and public school students when measuring assertiveness and self-concept. Results indicated homeschooled students to be more mature and better socialized than students sent to conventional schools (Delahooke, 1986; Shyers, 1992; Smedley, 1992).

A different view of socialization involving homeschoolers is what impact the practice of homeschooling has on the society at large (Apple, 2000; Lubienski, 2000). Both Apple and Lubienski (2000) criticized what they saw as a consumer mentality towards education. Parents make the decision they feel is best for their children without regard for how it affects others. According to Lubienski (2003), some believe that

homeschooling thwarts the public good because parents focus on their individual children to the loss of the whole of society.

However, Ray (2004a) suggested that homeschooled students benefitting individually will ultimately benefit the society at large. He surveyed 7,300 adults (ages 18 through 24) who were homeschooled for at least seven years during elementary and secondary school to determine their level of community and civic involvement. Among the respondents, 74 percent had taken college-level courses, compared to 46 percent of the general population. These adults reported being involved in their communities and engaged in civic affairs at higher rates than the average population (e.g., 71 percent of the homeschooled adults in his survey participated in ongoing community service compared to 37% of similarly aged U.S. adults and 39% of all U.S. adults). Ray (2004a) found that 88 percent of homeschooled adults were members of an organization, whether it was a professional, religious, community, or homeschool group.

Despite the arguments for and against homeschooling and the debate over the public versus private nature of education, research suggests homeschooled students are likely to be strongly predisposed to attending college (Ashford, 2005; Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Clemente, 2006; Collom, 2005; Galloway, 1995; Goodman, 2008; Gray, 1998; Jenkins, 1998; Jones, 2002; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; Lattibeaudiere, 2000; Lavoie, 2006; Medlin, 2000; Mexcur, 1993; Ray, 1997, 2000, 2004b, 2009b; and Rudner, 1999). Additionally, Gaither (2009a) reports that homeschooling diploma services have multiplied across the country, as have honor societies and dual-enrollment programs that allow homeschooled students to enroll in classes at local colleges. Yet, research is scarce

regarding the college experiences of homeschooled students. Following are some relevant studies regarding this population in higher education.

Studies of Homeschooled College Students

As a result of the growth of homeschooling in the United States, colleges and universities have received an increasing number of applications from homeschooled students (Pryor et al., 2008). Ray (2004b) found that 75 percent of homeschooled adults had taken college credits, of which 49 percent of those surveyed were full-time college students. Additionally, results indicated that approximately half of homeschooling parents had earned a bachelor's degree or higher (Ray, 2004b). A follow-up study revealed similar findings (i.e., 48.4 percent of mothers and 37.6 percent of fathers earned bachelor's degree; 11.6 percent of mothers and 20 percent of fathers earned master's degrees; and 2.5 percent of mothers and 8.7 percent of fathers earned doctorate degrees) (Ray, 2009b).

College Admissions and Homeschooled Students

The continued growth of homeschooled students in higher education raises concerns among institutions and homeschoolers alike – for the institutions as they attempt to refine policies and practices to accommodate this new population of students and for homeschooled students as they try to find the best institutional fit (Ray, 2007).

According to a recent National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) report, colleges and universities are increasingly adopting formal admission policies for homeschooled students. The report shows the percentage of American colleges with formal policies for assessing homeschooled students rose from 52 percent in 2000 to 83 percent in 2004 (Chandler, 2007).

In addition, as part of its 2004 Admission Trends Survey, NACAC asked colleges and universities what they required of homeschooled applicants, and what they recommended as information to be submitted to the admission office. Findings indicated between 80 and 90 percent of all colleges require homeschooled students to submit standardized test scores and a transcript or record of grades to describe their educational achievement (Chandler, 2007).

Jones and Gloeckner (2004a) surveyed 55 admissions officers at four-year colleges and universities in 12 states. The researchers found 43 percent of the respondents indicated that ACT or SAT scores were the most important factor in the admission of homeschool students. The essay was ranked second, followed by letters of recommendation, the personal interview, and the portfolio. However, they found mixed results regarding admission personnel's perceptions of homeschoolers. Whereas 78 percent of admission officers expected homeschool graduates to be as successful or even more successful (i.e., GPA, credits earned, retention) in comparison with traditional high school graduates, only 44 percent expected homeschool graduates to cope (socially) as well as traditional high school graduates. Overall, findings revealed that the majority of admissions officers surveyed had very positive feelings about homeschooled applicants (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a).

In addition, Callaway (2004) examined homeschool admissions policies and the performance of homeschooled students who were enrolled in 72 colleges and universities across the country. Results revealed that homeschooled students were generally happy with the way they were evaluated and universities were happy with the performance and graduation rates of the students they admitted.

Most recently, Sorey and Duggan (2008) surveyed admissions officers at 12 community colleges in Virginia to determine their attitudes toward homeschooled applicants as well as any special admissions requirements or programs for homeschoolers. The researchers found every admissions officer surveyed expected homeschooled applicants to do as well or better than other students at their institution. In particular, 64 percent believed traditional age homeschoolers were academically prepared for college, and 55 percent believed they were socially prepared. However, survey results revealed 46 percent of the admissions officers believed their job was more difficult when assessing homeschooled applicants given the lack of high school transcript for such students. As for special programs or services, 73 percent of the admissions officers said their schools had no special programs for homeschooled students either before or after admissions. Of those few who did provide something, they typically offered special orientations or one-on-one counseling with homeschooled applicants and their parents (Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

College Experiences of Homeschooled Students

The empirical research available on the transition and performance of homeschooled students after arriving at college is limited (Galloway & Sutton, 1995; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b; Lattibeaurdiere, 2000; Ray, 2004, 2009; Sutton & Galloway, 2000). The following are relevant studies found in the literature that address the college experiences of these students.

Bolle et al. (2007) examined transitional experiences of six previously homeschooled freshmen at a mid-sized public institution and found few differences between the college transition processes of homeschoolers and their traditionally-

schooled peers. Like traditionally-schooled students, homeschooled students experienced transitional issues such as loneliness, meeting others with different values, and dealing with greater independence.

White, Williford, Brower, and Collins (2007), utilized the College Adjustment Scale to compare the experiences of 18 Christian homeschooled college freshmen with a matched sample of 18 Christian traditionally-schooled freshmen. The researchers found that despite the fact that homeschooled students have additional adjustments to higher education (e.g., social relationships, peer pressure, classroom structure) as compared to traditionally-schooled freshmen (Romanowski, 2002), they appear to be able to adjust as well or better than traditionally-schooled freshmen to collegiate life.

Kranzow (2004) interviewed 18 homeschooled college students and 6 administrators at two small Christian universities. Findings revealed peer groups may have less influence on homeschooled students than they generally have in the lives of traditionally-schooled students. Results suggested that faculty members play a more critical role in the transition to college process for homeschooled students, above and beyond the role they play in the lives of more traditionally educated students.

Research appears to validate admission and graduation of homeschooled students as common occurrences in colleges and universities throughout the United States (Goodman, 2008; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b; Lyman, 2002; Ray, 1997). For instance, after reviewing the limited literature on academic achievement of homeschooled students in college published before 2000, Wichers (2001) concluded that “homeschooled students achieved similar, if not better success academically than their traditional public- or private-schooled counterparts in higher education” (p.145). One such study by Sutton

and Galloway (2000) investigated the undergraduate success of college graduates from 21 home schools, 17 public schools and 26 private schools nationwide. They used 40 indicators of college success that reflected five domains of learning outcomes – achievement, leadership, professional aptitude, physical activity, and social behavior. The researchers concluded that, overall, students from all high school settings received equivalent educations. However, findings revealed college graduates from home schools held significantly more leadership posts for significantly greater periods of time than did the private or public school groups.

Jones and Gloeckner (2004b) studied 55 homeschooled students and 53 traditionally-schooled students from four-year public institutions in Colorado. The researchers found no significant differences in first-year grade point averages, college retention rates, first-year credit hours earned, or ACT scores between homeschoolers and their traditionally-schooled peers. Notably, the results of this study indicated that homeschooled students are adequately prepared to transition and succeed in college and that their college experience is comparable to that of traditionally-schooled students (Bolle et al., 2004).

In a study examining the academic achievement of homeschooled students in higher education, Ashford (2005) found no significant differences when comparing the college GPAs of 50 homeschoolers and 50 public school students attending a Florida community college. Findings support previous research that homeschooled students are as prepared academically as their peers.

Similarly, in a recent study examining the social experiences of homeschooled students in higher education, Saunders (2009) found no significant effects on a student's

integration into college life based upon previous schooling. The researcher surveyed 261 college freshmen at Wheaton College. Results revealed a slightly stronger intent among homeschooled students to remain with Wheaton. Saunders (2009) suggests that colleges and universities with similar demographics as Wheaton College need not be concerned about homeschooled students finding ways to socially integrate and persist on their campuses.

However, little empirical research has been done on how homeschooled students experience college. Most evidence is anecdotal (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). For example, sample sizes are small and tend to be convenience samples and findings are applicable to the homeschoolers selected for each particular study, but not necessarily to the entire homeschool population. In effect, such is the case in this particular study as well.

Overview of the College Choice Process

College choice has been a topic of research for many years. Since Paulsen's AHSE-ERIC Higher Education Report (1990) on student enrollment behaviors, hundreds of publications have explored the processes through which students determine whether and where to go to college and the factors that influence these processes (Bergerson, 2009).

Typically, from a theoretical perspective, college choice has been studied using one of three lenses – sociological, psychological, and economic (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Paulsen, 1990). Sociological studies look at the impact of one's social status on the development of educational aspirations, attainment, and the cause for inequities. Psychological studies examine the influence of others, campus climate, cost, and academic programs on students' choices. Economic studies

view college as an investment decision and assume that students want to maximize cost-benefits in their choice of college (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). College choice is often studied under one of these three different paradigms.

Research suggests the college choice process has presumably always been multifaceted and in many instances complicated. Over the years, several models of college choice have been created to better understand this process for students. The following sections of the literature review will explore college choice models, in particular, Hossler and Gallagher's three-stage model (1987), and the factors that influence students' selection of a college.

College Choice Models

The 1980s brought a focus on developing comprehensive models to explain the college choice process. Characteristics of these models are the ability to illustrate the interactions among individual students, institutional characteristics, and external factors as students make postsecondary plans (Henrickson, 2002). In addition, these college choice models are robust, as they paint a picture of interactions over time and provide researchers with numerous process points and variables for further research (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Hendrickson, 2002; Jackson, 1986; Perna, 2006; Teranishi et al., 2004).

To illustrate, Chapman (1981) developed a causal model, which attempted to demonstrate the relationships between student characteristics, institutional characteristics, and college decision-making. Chapman's causal model of college choice demonstrated how student characteristics (e.g., aspirations, socio-economic status, academic achievement) and external factors (e.g., influential others, institutional characteristics, institutional communication with students) interacted with students'

expectation of the college experience to determine the institutions students would apply to and their enrollment decisions.

Building on Chapman's (1981) model, Litten (1982) examined how the process of institutional choice differs for students from different racial and ethnic groups, gender, academic ability, parent education, and geographic location. The researcher found differences in the timing of the choice process, how college information was obtained, and parents' role in the planning process. That same year, Hanson and Litten (1982) proposed a three-stage model consisting of the decision to go to college, college investigation, and application, admission, and attendance.

Kotler and Fox (1985) incorporated the decision of whether to go to college by adding two stages to the enrollment decision steps: the consideration of alternative options such as work, military service, or higher education, and "product form alternatives" (p. 205) that included choices between public or private and large or small institutions. From here, models began to describe the entire process of college and institutional choice, developing a series of steps or stages through which students progress, from deciding whether to enter postsecondary education to their specific enrollment decisions (Bergerson, 2009).

One such college choice model, Hossler and Gallagher (1987), comprises three stages, predisposition, search, and choice through which students' progress as they move from educational aspirations to college enrollment. The model is considered developmental in that each stage is associated with particular cognitive and affective outcomes that ultimately lead to enrollment in college (Henrickson, 2002). According to Bergerson (2009), the Hossler and Gallagher model (1987) is the most widely cited

comprehensive college choice model. A unique attribute of this model is the focus on the student rather than the institution (Hossler et al., 1999). Thus, this model is used for the purposes of this study. A detailed description of the model follows.

Hossler and Gallagher's College Choice Model

Drawing from previous research (Chapman, 1981; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982), Hossler and Gallagher (1987) suggested a three-stage developmental college choice model. During each stage, both individual and organizational factors interact and result in various outcomes. The model takes into account, not only student traits, but also attributes of high schools and colleges, in the student's process of college selection (p. 208).

According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), during the predisposition stage students make decisions about pursuing postsecondary education. The development of aspirations is central to this stage of the model. The researchers suggest that this stage of the model is least studied and understood though certain background characteristics, such as socio-economic status, have strong relationships with students' decisions to attend college.

The second stage, search, involves students' formulation of attributes and values of colleges that they wish to consider. It is during the search stage that students seek information about specific colleges and universities. The search stage is not static and students approach this stage in very different ways from one another (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Choice is the final stage. During this stage, students make decisions about which colleges to apply and ultimately which to attend. This stage involves evaluation of the

colleges and universities that remain in the student's choice set. Additionally, this tends to be a very interactive process between the student, her or his parents, and institutions. This is particularly true as it relates to the awarding of financial aid and judgment about institutional quality based on direct communication with the college or university (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

As Hossler et al. (1999) observed the Hossler and Gallagher model is primarily sociological. The researchers suggest that background characteristics are correlated with the predisposition stage, the point at which students choose to go to college. These background characteristics are cumulative in terms of their effect upon the college choice process; varying only in their level of influence during the stages of the process they always operate (p. 150).

Merranko (2005) suggests that a shortcoming of the Hossler and Gallagher model is its failure to address how the organizational and individual student factors affect diverse student populations. This study explores how Catholic homeschooled students go through college choice process, without the influence of high school teachers, classmates, and counselors. The study examines the degree of parental involvement and diverse background characteristics of homeschooled students to reveal how these factors influence the college choice process of this population of students.

Notably, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model has provided a jumping-off point for the research of many scholars over the last twenty years. Some studies tested and expanded on particular stages of the model, while others used the model as a foundation for new models (Bergerson, 2009). This trend in the literature

after 1990, in which authors began to examine the experience of students from different backgrounds with a more critical eye, is consistent with the focus of this study.

Influences on College Choice

In *Choosing Colleges*, McDonough (1997) writes: “The issue least well-understood about students’ college destinations is the causal process – the web of opportunities, structural arrangements, contingencies, and timing – through which school context, socio-economic status, and family together shape the process of college planning and choices” (p. 6). As the preceding sentence suggests, the college choice process is complex, and that is in no small part due to the fact that the many variables in the process and the unstructured nature of the variables makes the relationships between and among them even more challenging to understand.

Research indicates that enrollment decisions are related to 1) students’ individual and family characteristics (Brewer, Eide, & Ehrenberg, 1999; Hearn, 1987; Manski & Wise, 1983; Paulsen, 1990); 2) institutional characteristics, such as financial considerations and academic reputation (Fuller, Manski, & Wise, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Weiler, 1994); and 3) the influences of significant others, including parents, relatives, teachers and counselors (Bradshaw, Espinoza, & Hausman, 2001; Hossler et al., 1999; Lillard & Gerner, 1999). Thus, this study focuses primarily on literature pertaining to parents, the students themselves, and institutional characteristics. From my review of the literature, these factors appear most often as major influences on the college choice process.

Parental Influence

The majority of college choice literature points to parents as the single most influential variable in determining a student's postsecondary school plans and chances of attending college (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Jackson, 1978, 1982; Litten, 1982; Manski & Wise, 1983; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000). To illustrate, a recent report commissioned by the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (2007) stated, "Regardless of socio-economic status or ethnic and racial category, parents play the strongest role in the college choice and decision-making processes for traditional-aged students" (p. iii).

Parents' Income

The socioeconomic status of an individual's family impacts the type of institution that an applicant will consider affordable and be able to enroll at, as higher economic status students are more likely to enroll in four-year institutions (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). In particular, Hossler et al. (1989) found that students' socio-economic status was related to the cost and quality of institutions they ultimately choose. For students with high socio-economic status, quality was more important, as cost was not as significant a factor. In comparison, students with low socio-economic status were less likely to attend high status colleges. Results revealed both high and low socio-economic groups were likely to attend private institutions (Hossler et al., 1989).

McDonough (1997) stated that a student's family income, a part of a family's socio-economic status, contributes to the cultural capital they bring to their college search. She suggests students with higher income, higher socio-economic status, and

presumably more cultural capital may place different values on what is important to them in looking for a college than those with lower family incomes.

Similarly, Delaney (1998) found that higher income students attributed more importance to the college's surroundings and ambience, while lower income students focused more on more practical issues, such as programs and costs. However, some researchers have found that family income is not a reliable predictor of students' educational plans (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Paulsen, 1990), but agree that parental educational level does influence students' plans for college (Manski & Wise, 1983).

Parents' Education

The educational background of parents has been shown to be significant to an individual's college choice decision (Hossler & Stage, 1992; NPEC, 2007). Students with parents who have received a bachelor's and/or advanced degrees are more likely to attend an institution of higher education, while students whose parents do not have any postsecondary education are less likely to enroll at a college or university (Hossler & Stage, 1992; Jackson, 1986). To illustrate, Jackson (1986) found that a student's chances of attending college increased 6 percent with each year of his or her parents' formal education. Additionally, Hossler and Stage (1992) found parents' education level was positively related to high parent expectations of the student, high expectations of the student for him or herself, high student GPA, and significant student involvement in extracurricular activities.

According to the *Deciding on Postsecondary Education: Final Report (2007)*, students with parents who have a college education are more likely to value the

information that their parents provide regarding the college choice process. Research indicates that those students whose parents have had some college education are more likely to begin the college selection process earlier than those students whose parents had no college education (Hossler et al., 1989; Litten, 1982). Hossler et al. (1989) found high levels of parental education were not only associated with students applying earlier to college, but applying to more colleges, and applying specifically to private, four-year colleges. Multiple studies have shown that the educational background of parents is one of the most important indicators on the predisposition of an individual's college choice process (Bers & Galowich, 2002; Hossler et al., 1999).

Homeschool families generally have middle to higher levels of parental income and participation in homeschooling is higher among families with at least one parent who had earned a college degree (Planty et al., 2009; Lips & Feinberg, 2009). These two factors would indicate that many homeschooled students are coming from families with middle to higher socioeconomic backgrounds and a relatively higher level of parental education. This study explores how these characteristics (i.e., parental education and income) influence the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students.

Parental Encouragement and Support

As prominently as parent income and education figure into a student's chances of pursuing college, they are not the most significant variables in the college choice process. The importance of and distinction between parental encouragement and support pervade the literature. Hossler et al. (1999) define parental encouragement as “the frequency of discussions between parents and students about parents' expectations, hopes, and dreams for their children” (p. 24). In contrast, parental support tends to be much more tangible

and direct. It is the parents' active investment in a student's future. Examples include parents saving money for postsecondary education, taking the student on college visits, attending financial aid workshops, and assisting with applications and forms.

The literature suggests parental encouragement is one of the strongest influences on a student's predisposition to attend college (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). According to Hossler et al. (1999) parents influence students at a very young age to attend college simply by assuming that their children will attend college. Findings revealed that students entered high school with every intention of attending college if the messages they heard from parents while they were growing up were: "a high school diploma is not enough," "of course, you will go to college," or "don't worry about paying for college, somehow we'll find the money" (p. 134). McDonough (1997) concurs that setting aspirations, providing encouragement and active support are three broadly defined activities that capture parental involvement in college choice.

Advocates feel one of the strongest benefits that homeschooling offers is the parent-child relationship (Lines, 2000). Because of the unique educational environment of homeschooling, one might assume that parental encouragement and support are greater for homeschooled students than their traditionally-schooled counterparts. This study addresses this assumption and attempts to answer the question, "What role do Catholic homeschooled students' parents play in their college choice process?"

Student Characteristics

Academic Ability

Studies show that the student characteristics of academic ability (i.e., standardized test scores) and achievement (i.e., grade point average) have a great impact on either a

student's plans to attend college or a student's actual matriculation to college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Manski & Wise, 1983; Paulsen, 1990). After reviewing previous research, Paulsen (1990) concluded that a person is more likely to desire to attend college when student academic aptitude and academic achievement are greater.

Paulsen's (1990) literature review yielded the following relationships regarding students' academic ability: When a student's academic aptitude and achievement are greater, he or she is more likely to apply to or attend: 1) a more highly selective institution; 2) a high-cost institution; 3) an institution located a greater distance from home; 4) a private institution rather than a public institution; and 5) a four-year institution. Likewise, the researcher found that the higher the academic ability of a student, the greater the concern about academic standards, program offerings, and awareness of "net cost" rather than just "price" and the lesser the concern about career outcomes, campus appearance, and financial matters (p. 50).

Avery and Hoxby (2004) use data from the College Admissions Project, which included 3,240 students from 396 high schools and found that high-aptitude students were nearly indifferent to a college's distance from their home, to whether it is in-state, and to whether it is public. However, these students were sensitive to tuition, room, and board in the expected direction; lower is better. They preferred to attend the most selective colleges in their choice set and were attracted by grants, loans, and work-study commitments.

According to Duggan (2010), homeschooling is a unique form of education, in which there is a great deal of individualized instruction, a great amount of parent engagement in the child's education, an overarching motivation for student academic

success, and substantial insulation from the “ills of society” to which many public school students are exposed. As homeschooled students come from learning environments that differ from traditionally-schooled students, one may question how the homeschooled student views several aspects of learning, including instructors, evaluation of their work, contributions from their peers, and the nature of knowledge (Duggan, 2010). While each homeschooler has his or her own unique experiences that stem from the student’s needs and parental motivations, the dual role of mother or father as both instructor and parent may possibly lead to very different views of learning and higher education.

Educational Aspiration

Another variable strongly related to the likelihood of enrolling in college is a student's educational aspiration, measured by the highest level of formal education a high school student reports wanting to complete (Jackson, 1978; Manski & Wise, 1983). In their longitudinal study, Hossler et al. (1999) found that students’ family background, academic performance, peers and other high school experiences influence the development of their postsecondary educational plans. Additionally, Hamrick and Stage (2004) claim role models play an important role in helping students develop college aspirations. Findings revealed that without role models or mentors who have benefited from a higher education, student predisposition was negatively affected simply due to unfamiliarity.

Paulsen (1990) examined and interpreted the findings of 16 studies that focused on the factors that shape a student’s educational aspirations. The studies examined the influences of family background, academic ability and high school background on college aspiration formation. Paulson (1990) concluded that the formation of basic

college aspirations is strongly related to student background and ability factors.

Therefore, a homeschooled student's background, ability, and contextual factors, including the homeschool environment, are correlated with the formation of their educational aspirations.

Gender

According to Mansfield and Warwick (2005) there are differences between men and women in the factors that are important to them in the college choice process. The researchers surveyed 192 high school seniors and their parents and found significant differences between men and women in the importance they placed on financial aid, finances overall, security, overall physical characteristics, academics and atmosphere. Women rated all of these factors as more important than men. However, Hossler et al. (1989) found gender had some relationship during the early stages of the college choice process, but they did not find many connections between gender and the later choice stage of the process.

Litten (1982) detected gender differences as well. He found that students tend to consult more with parents of the same sex and females were more likely to rely on significant people in their lives for information and influence than males. Yet, according to Hawkins and Clinedinst (2007) with the advent of the Internet, more students (male and female) are using technology as a source of information and placing more importance on that information. The researchers predict that the importance of collegiate web pages and other technological applications (e.g., e-mailing and texting) will continue to grow in importance to high school seniors. This study examines the resources used during the search process of both male and female Catholic homeschooled students.

Institutional Characteristics

Research suggests institutional characteristics play an important role in the college choice process (Hossler et al., 1999; Hoyt & Brown, 2003). The relationship between students' preferences and institutional characteristics is a significant determinant of where students ultimately decide to attend college (Weiler, 1994). For instance, a recent survey in *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac Issue (2009)* reported that freshmen at four-year colleges considered the following reasons as very important in selecting college attended, in descending order: very good academic reputation, college's graduates get good jobs, financial assistance offered, campus visit, cost of attendance, size of college, social activities, graduate school admission rate, location near home, information from web site, national magazine's rankings, and parental encouragement (p. 18).

Additionally, Hoyt and Brown (2003) reviewed 22 studies related to college choice in order to identify institutional factors that were most frequently cited as important to students. The views of over 30,000 students in 18 states were represented in this comprehensive review. Among the 22 studies examined, nine factors took first place as far as level of importance to students. Those nine factors, in order of frequency, included: academic reputation, location, quality of instruction, availability of programs, quality of faculty, costs, reputable program, financial aid, and job outcomes. Other variables which were included in the studies, but did not make the number one spot included: variety of courses offered, size of the institution, surrounding community, availability of graduate programs, student employment opportunities, quality of social

life, class size, graduate school outcomes, extracurricular programs, friendly/personal service, affiliation, admission requirements, and attractiveness of campus facilities (p. 5).

It is important to note that the institutional factors identified by Hoyt and Brown (2003) were a result of the review of perceptions of students from a variety of segments, including high school students with a full range of academic abilities, community college students, and non-traditional transfer students. One may infer that the relative importance of the factors in the preceding paragraph likely varies by specific market segment. Therefore, the institutional factors that are most influential to the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students are explored in this study.

Reputation

The reputation of the institution, both academically and socially, and how that reputation fits with an individual, impacts whether the student will apply to that institution (Chapman, 1981; Paulsen & St. John, 1992; Zimbhoff, 2005). The offerings of an institution (e.g., classes, majors, special programs) also impact the desire of students to apply to a particular institution (NPEC, 2007; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Data from a Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) report indicated 56.2 percent of the 2001 freshman class cited, “very good academic reputation” as a “very important factor” in the college selection process (Bartlett, 2002). More recent data from College Board (2008) indicates that academic quality was the top factor for 84 percent of students completing the CIRP Freshman Survey in helping them decide where to attend college.

In addition, studies revealed that the importance of national ranking publications (e.g., U.S. News and World Report) along with resource materials (e.g., The College Handbook) were considered more important than information provided by the individual

colleges (Boyer, 1987; Canale & Dunlap, 1996; Hawkins & Clinedinst, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). For instance, Giffith and Rask (2007) looked specifically at the influence of one source, *U. S. News and World Report (USNWR)* on the college choice decisions of high achieving students. The researchers utilized data from the Colgate Admitted Student Questionnaire, which included approximately 1,200 students between the years 1995 to 2004. Results showed that 80 percent of the respondents' first-choice schools were in the top 25 of USNWR rankings and a little more than 50 percent of all students eventually attended the school with the highest ranking that year.

In terms of influence, Giffith and Rask (2007) found that USNWR annual college rankings highly impacted students' final choices in institutions. However, national ranking publications and other resource materials were not ranked as important as campus visits, college websites, parents, or guidance counselors (Hawkins & Clinedinst, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Location

The geographic location and the proximity of the institution in relation to the residence of the family also impact an individual's college choice decision. According to Hoyt and Brown (2003), studies suggest that the current generation of college-bound high school students is much more likely to attend college out-of-state than were previous generations. In particular, research suggests students are more likely to attend college outside of their local market area when they are male, they belong to a higher socio-economic status, their parents have higher education levels, and they have high academic abilities and educational aspirations (Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Paulsen, 1990).

Overall, location has been identified as an important characteristic for both students and institutions to consider (Lang, 1999). However, some of the latest research provided by College Board (2008) indicates through the CIRP Freshman Survey that 79 percent of students surveyed did not believe location was “very important.”

Cost of Attendance

The cost of the institution and the amount and type of financial aid a student receives impacts the ability of an individual to enroll at their top-choice institution (Callendar & Jackson, 2008; Hossler, 2000; Kim, 2004; Kurlaender, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). These characteristics of the institution bear on the student’s decision on whether to apply and enroll at a particular college or university. For instance, UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute (2002) surveyed college freshmen and found that one in five freshmen attending their second choice college did so because they could not afford their first choice.

According to CIRP Freshman Survey (2008), in 1977, 18 percent of students entering college reported that financial assistance was “very important” in their college decision. Over the last three decades that figure has risen steadily in importance, reaching nearly 40 percent in 2007, which is the highest this figure has been in 35 years. There appears to be an ever-widening gap between the costs of higher education and the family and external resources available.

For understandable reasons, the financial realities of a college education are influencing a student’s choice of where to attend college, and the subject has drawn a great deal of attention from researchers (DesJardins, Ahlburg & McCall, 2006; Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1984; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, et al., 1999; Kim, 2004;

McPherson & Schapiro, 1991; Parker & Summers, 1993). Much of the existing research supports the notion that, regarding students' interests in developing human capital, students consider the trade-offs between current costs and future expectations of financial and non-financial benefits (Hill, 2008).

Additionally, there is some agreement within the literature that, while the availability of financial aid is considered important by most college-bound students, the impact of cost and financial aid decrease as students' income level and academic ability increase (Kim, 2004; Manski & Wise, 1983; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). It appears that financial consideration is a factor likely to influence homeschooled students' enrollment decisions.

Religious Affiliation

Little research has been completed on how prospective students factor an institution's religious affiliation in their college choice decision. In general, a synopsis of the research does not indicate that an institution's religious affiliation plays a large role in college selection. For example, Zerby (2002) indicated just 18.1 percent of students at three Catholic all-women institutions were influenced by the religious affiliation. Likewise, Guido (2001) demonstrated only 15 percent of students enrolled at Catholic institutions indicated the Catholic identity of the institution was a "very important" factor in their decision to enroll.

Yet, in a more recent study, Garrett (2004) interviewed 60 freshmen at a Catholic institution to investigate whether the institution's Catholic affiliation influenced their college selection process. Freshmen who attended Catholic high schools and who are Catholic were participants of the study. Findings revealed the Catholic identity of the

institution was an important secondary factor, as were institutional size and distance from home. The institution's academics was the predominate factor. Interestingly, however, out of the 220 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States with a total enrollment of nearly 800,000 in 2010, only 55.4 percent of full-time freshman self-reported as being Catholic (Filteau, 2010).

Cultural and Social Capital

Research indicates that cultural and social capital further explains students' choice to attend or not attend college (Horvat, 2001; Hossler et al., 1989; McDonough, 1997; Paulsen, 2001). According to Bourdieu and Passerson (1977), cultural and social capital are inherited and passed down through family, specifically through one's parents.

Cultural capital is the system of factors individuals derived from their parents that defines their class status (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997). It is often described as an individual's cultural knowledge, language skills, educational credentials and school-related information, derived largely from parents' class status (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977).

Cultural capital, developed by Bourdieu as a partial explanation for the less tangible or less immediately visible inequalities, is related to the class-based socialization of culturally relevant skills, abilities, tastes, preferences, or norms that act as a form of currency in the social realm (Bourdieu, 1979, 1984). Cultural capital can include such things as cultural awareness, knowledge about educational institutions (schools), educational credentials, and aesthetic preferences (such as taste in music, art, or food) (Swartz, 1997). It also includes skills, abilities, or mannerisms, which are primarily habituated and may not be consciously noticed (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Winkle-Wagner

(2010) suggests that cultural capital is essentially meaningless without mentioning or examining the field in which it is contextualized. Language, dress, behavior, and even thought processes all represent students' past experiences and cultural capital (Lareau, 2002).

Researchers often define social capital as an individual's access to information, resources and support, acquired through participation or interaction with others who participate in social networks or structures (Coleman, 1988; Perna, 2006; Portes, 1998). Bourdieu (1979/1984) conceived of social capital as "social connections, honorability and respectability" that work as a form of capital in social settings (p. 122). These resources based on group memberships, relationships, and networks influence and support a person's status (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu's social capital implies a sense of obligation between people. Like cultural capital, social capital is only relevant in the field in which it is a part (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

McDonough (1997) claims students have a common set of beliefs and structures which shape their expectations, attitudes, and aspirations and are used to evaluate decisions in a routine manner utilizing personal history, cultural beliefs, and familial traditions. Students make choices for their aspirations by looking at people who surround them, and observing what is considered good or appropriate across a variety of dimensions (McDonough, 1997). Included in this is the type of college education they are entitled to. The researcher suggests that students' thinking processes; their rationality, will limit choices of colleges based on their cultural capital.

According to McDonough (1997), cultural capital is the "ammunition" students bring to their college choice process. They make their decision, at least in part, through

the lens of who they are and where they come from. In the case of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, this lens may alter or even eliminate some of their possibilities for a higher education. McDonough (1997) found that students attending schools in lower socio-economic areas often are not exposed to the academic atmosphere that encourages going to college. These students are likely to limit their educational aspirations to what they deem as likely or normal according to their particular social class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Additionally, students utilize their cultural and social capital to determine whether a specific college or college in general, feels right (McDonough, 1997). To illustrate, McDonough (1997) presented case studies of 12 White, female, high school seniors in California from different socioeconomic backgrounds and high school cultures. She found that “college-bound students of relatively the same academic achievement and similar social class backgrounds make remarkably similar college choices. The choices were qualitatively different from the choices made by relatively equal-ability students from different social class backgrounds. In addition, students varied in their timing in terms of when they begin the college choice process, what they consider to be reasonable college destinations, the level of parental and school support and involvement, the interpretation of reasonable distances from home, and financial considerations, as well as a sense of entitlement that hinges on their class background (McDonough, 1997).

Paulsen (2001) suggests the decision to attend college is influenced by the cultural and social capital on which individuals and families rely in order to meet a certain set of established values in society. The researcher contends that a student’s social class and related cultural capital consistently frames, structures, and constrains students’ patterns of

college-going decision-making. For example, parents from a higher socio-economic background have more material wealth and are usually more educated and motivated to educate their children. These parents have more access to college materials and can provide the help and information necessary in the college decision-making process. This is contrasted with students from a lower socio-economic background, where parents have less material wealth, which lessens their cultural capital. These parents usually are not as educated and are not as equipped to motivate their children in educational decisions (Paulsen, 2001). These students tend to have less access to school related information, thus limiting their college choices and their understanding of available financial aid. Consequently, families with higher levels of cultural and social capital are better prepared to access and attain postsecondary education (Paulsen & St. John, 2002).

Overall, research has shown that cultural and social capital is valuable and has relevance in students' college choice (Hossler et al., 1989; Paulsen, 1990; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; St. John & Asker, 2001). Yet, it is not clear how these concepts are understood and used by homeschooled students as they embark on their college choice process. A class-driven approach has yet to be applied, much less empirically tested, in analyses of homeschooling. Since the above studies were not conducted with homeschoolers, it is important to distinguish whether the same factors would affect the college choice process of homeschooled students in the same way they affect traditionally-schooled students.

Many of the studies included in this literature review are helpful in providing an understanding of how traditionally-schooled students navigate the college choice process. However, despite the importance of such information, the college choice process of

homeschooled students is unknown. Although research has shown that cultural and social capital are valuable and have relevance in students' college choice, it is not clear how these concepts are understood and used by homeschooled students as they go through the college choice process. In this study, use of the concepts of cultural and social capital may shed some light on how Catholic homeschooled students chose to attend Benedictine College and other higher education institutions.

Summary

As previously stated, homeschooling is an increasingly common phenomenon in the United States. It has developed from a small, isolated, parent-led effort to a vibrant national movement to lobby for and legalize K-12 education at home in all 50 states. Research suggests about 1.5 to 2.0 million children in the country are being officially homeschooled, making it a vital and expanding form of private education and political force in our society (Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Lips & Feinberg, 2008; Planty et al., 2009; Ray, 2009a).

Based on the review of homeschooling research and published literature, homeschooling parents have chosen to educate their children at home for various reasons, including religion, academic excellence, safety, family values, curriculum, dissatisfaction in public schools, and meeting needs of special needs or gifted children (Collom, 2005).

According to Edwards (2007), homeschooling has come under fire from some educators who believe that students will not receive the same level of academic or social preparation at home as they would from a traditional school. However, studies of academic preparation and socialization of homeschooled students generally conclude positive results with many studies supporting the position that they are just as capable of

success in college as traditionally-schooled students (Clemente, 2006; Knowles, 1988; Mayberry, 1989; McLoughlin & Chambers, 2004; Ray 2000, 2009b; Rudner, 1999; Smedley, 1992).

As one might expect, as more families choose to educate their children at home, the numbers of homeschool graduates are increasing. Many of these students are choosing to pursue higher education at colleges and universities across the country. Because homeschooled students are taught at home, the choices they make and act on after high school and the rationale for their choices are worth identifying in order to assist college administrators and admissions counselors to effectively recruit and better serve this new population of student.

As demonstrated in this literature review, Hossler and Gallagher's three-stage college choice model (1987) along with full consideration of environmental factors provides a picture of students' experiences relating to college choice and selection. The model provides general categories that students fall into based on college aspirations and college choice. Its stages highlight the specific processes that students encounter on their journey toward college entry. The literature also reflects the complexity of college choice as factors influence the process and play an important role in students' decision-making (e.g., parental influences, student themselves, and institutional characteristics).

Today, the increasing competition for students among higher education institutions necessitates an understanding of the processes students use, not only to make institutional selections, but also to decide whether to attend college at all. With cuts in institutional budgets as a result of the current economic recession, the need to target marketing and recruitment efforts is growing. According to Palmer (2003), an

understanding of college choice allows one to spend institutional dollars wisely, diversify the college by recruiting students from particular demographic groups, understand the link between financial aid and students' college decision-making, and manage college enrollments. Therefore, it is necessary for Benedictine College and other higher education institutions to understand the college choice process not only of traditionally-schooled students, but also of homeschooled students to effectively attract these students.

This chapter sets the context through a literature review related to the primary question of this study: "How do Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process?" In Chapter Three, I describe the methodology used to answer this question.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study attempts to understand the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students. In an effort to explore this phenomenon, a qualitative research methodology is employed. As Bodgan and Biklen (1998) write, this allows me to “better understand human behavior and experience...grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are” (p. 38).

Additionally, qualitative studies are typically used when an area of interest is devoid of existing research (Merriam, 1998). Currently, the college choice process of homeschooled students and the meaning that these students make of this experience is missing in the literature. Through the use of a qualitative research methodology, I gather firsthand reflections from a sample of Catholic homeschooled students who applied to Benedictine College.

This chapter provides a theoretical and practical foundation for the research methods used in this study. It includes an explanation of the following aspects of the study: the design of the study, methodological approach, site selection, role of the researcher and researcher’s perspective, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and limitations.

Research Design

A qualitative research design is used to conduct this study. Qualitative research offers the researcher the opportunity to gain understanding through interviews and natural interactions with the participants. According to Creswell (2005), qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from

participants, describes and analyzes these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner (p. 39).

Merriam (1998) claims the essential characteristics of qualitative research include: the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning; the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the use of fieldwork; an inductive orientation to analysis; and findings that are “comprehensive, holistic, expansive and richly descriptive” (p. 9). These characteristics are vital to giving meaning and interpreting the experiences of the participants.

Creswell (1998) suggests the reason for choosing a qualitative methodology revolves primarily around the type of question or problem to be explored. The author explains that “how” and “why” questions usually are explained most effectively through qualitative research, as it is both interactive and interconnected. As this study is specifically guided by the research question, “How do Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process?” the research inquiry needs a qualitative research design to produce fluid and engaging responses.

Methodological Approach

Qualitative Method

The type of qualitative research method that I conduct in this study is a basic interpretive qualitative study. Basic interpretive qualitative studies are the most common qualitative research method found in education. In a basic interpretive qualitative study, the researcher is interested in “understanding how a participant makes meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Merriam

(1998) suggests, in interpretive research, education is considered to be a process and school is a lived experience. Understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, hypotheses or theory generating (rather than a deductive or testing) mode of inquiry (Merriam, 1998, p. 4).

In conducting a basic qualitative study, one seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these. Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis. These data are inductively analyzed to identify the recurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data. A rich, descriptive account of the findings is presented and discussed, using references to the literature that framed the study (Merriam, 2002, p.6).

This study is particularly suited to a basic interpretive approach for a number of reasons. Primarily, because my goal is to understand the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students and the meaning attached to this process. In particular, I want to understand college choice from the “participants’ perspective” and to discern “how their understandings influenced their behavior” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 17). I wish to understand the homeschool/family context of the participants and how this context influences participants’ behavior. I seek to understand the predisposition, search, and choice experiences of homeschooled students as college choice is a process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage 1992) and a qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring processes (Maxwell, 1996). Lastly, I aim to investigate what factors influenced Catholic homeschooled students to enroll or not to enroll in Benedictine College and the

“causal explanation” for why participants attached specific meaning to their college choice (Maxwell, 1996, p. 20).

My choice of a basic interpretive approach is also appropriate for a final reason that Maxwell (1996) cites: findings from this study may “help improve existing practice” (p. 21). For instance, findings from this study may assist Benedictine College’s admissions staff in being more aware of Catholic homeschooled students’ needs and may help the college recruit and market itself better to these students and their families. Findings from this study may help improve existing practice at other higher education institutions as well.

Site Selection

The research site selected for this study is Benedictine College, a small Catholic liberal arts college located in the Midwestern part of the United States. The mission of Benedictine College is to educate men and women within a community of faith and scholarship. Placing an emphasis on its mission, the enrollment at the college has increased 85 percent over the last decade and its national reputation has improved. In fall 2009, the college reported a total enrollment of 1877 students, of which 1430 were full-time undergraduates and 428 were beginning freshmen.

Benedictine College is accredited by the North Central Association Higher Learning Commission and offers Undergraduate Programs of Study that include 39 four-year majors, 31 minors, 10 pre-profession, and 2 certification programs (Benedictine College, 2009a). For the 2009-2010 academic year, the institutional costs for a freshman attending Benedictine College was \$26, 225 (i.e., tuition and fees: \$19,500; average freshman residence hall: \$3,630; and 19-meal plan: \$3,095). The average financial aid

award including scholarships, loans, and grants was \$19,874 (Benedictine College, 2009a).

Benedictine College is considered moderately selective, requiring an ACT composite score of at least an 18, and a 860 or higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a “C” average in high school and graduation in the upper half of one’s high school senior class (Benedictine College Catalog). In fall 2009, the all-college average ACT was 23.78, including the freshmen class average ACT score of 24.1 (Benedictine College, 2009a). The student body is primarily White/non-Hispanic (83 percent) and Roman Catholic (80 percent). The male to female ratio is 48 percent to 52 percent. On-campus residence is 78 percent. Student-athletes represent 31 percent of the student body and legacy students account for 23 percent (Benedictine College, 2009a).

Additionally, 31 percent of Benedictine College students are Kansas residents and 69 percent are out-of-state residents, representing 39 states and Puerto Rico and 13 foreign countries. However, approximately 66 percent of the student body is from a four state region consisting of Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Colorado.

According to an Admissions Office Enrollment Comparison Report (2009), the fall 2009 retention rate was 90.4 percent. This retention rate has increased from 88.8 percent in fall 2007. The first-year persistence rate has increased as well from 76.1 percent in fall 2007 to 77.4 percent in fall 2009. The college is named by the Center for the Study of Catholic Higher Education as a “Best Buy in Faithfulness and Affordability,” is listed in by the Cardinal Newman Society as “One of the Top 20 Catholic Colleges in America,” and is recognized in U.S. News and World Report as “One of America’s Best Colleges.” (www.benedictine.edu).

However, with a small endowment, Benedictine College is dependent on a steady enrollment to remain financially positive. The annual growth rate of tuition at the college from 2004 to 2009 was 5.22 percent, which was slightly higher than the 4.54 percent rate among the Kansas Independent College Association (KICA) peer institutions (Reaccreditation Self-Study Report, 2009). Because tuition is the primary revenue source for the college, it is important to monitor tuition, room, and board costs and the amount and type of financial aid a student receives.

Admissions counselors at Benedictine College recruit homeschooled students with methods similar to those used to recruit traditionally-schooled students, with the exception of high school visits. Currently, the college has 5 full-time admissions counselors and 6 support staff who are supervised by the Dean of Enrollment Management. Each admissions counselor is assigned a particular recruiting territory across the country. The admissions office employs methods of communication that include electronic, telecommunication, face-to-face, direct mail and e-mail, and Royall & Company searches. The college sends a representative to an annual national homeschooling conference and responds to questions from online discussion groups. However, it does not have a specific admissions counselor assigned to recruit only homeschooled students, nor a specific reference to homeschooled students on the college website.

The Benedictine College admissions office follows the recommended policies relative to homeschooled students as outlined by the National Center for Home Education (NCHE), a division of the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). These policies include: 1) not requiring higher test scores on the ACT, SAT, or other

standardized tests; 2) supplying homeschool graduates with a homeschool credit evaluation in lieu of a transcript; 3) recognizing the validity of homeschool diplomas; 4) not requiring homeschool applicants to obtain a GED; 5) accepting a bibliography of high school literature and a student essay as a reflection of the student's skills; and 6) evaluating extracurricular activities and interviews as a way of measuring student proficiency (HSLDA, 2007).

Finally, Benedictine College is the site for the study due to its accessibility and growing percent of Catholic homeschooled students within the student body. As a full-time administrator at the college, I have permission to use the college and its constituents as the basis of this study. Homeschooled students applying to Benedictine College have reached an all time high, from 82 applicants for fall 2009 to 102 applicants for fall 2010. The college admissions office reports homeschooled students come from 15 states across the country (e.g., Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Arizona, California, Texas, and Maryland). Thus, Benedictine College provides a rich environment in which to conduct this study.

Conducting the Study

Role of the Researcher

It would be an understatement to say that I am dedicated to the mission and values of Benedictine College and its students. After graduating from the college in 1981, I have served in various student affairs positions for the past 25 years, currently as Vice-President of Student Life. In my current administrative position, I work with various college departments, such as admissions, academics, athletics, operations, and communications departments in promoting the college, serving its students, and

addressing various college-wide issues. I fully support collaborative efforts and believe that open communication is essential for successful outcomes.

The topic of this study interests me because of several conversations I've had with prospective parents of homeschooled students and admissions counselors, coaches, faculty, and student life staff regarding recruitment and retention initiatives. For example, in a recent discussion with admissions staff regarding efforts to enhance recruitment and communication with homeschooled families, the issue surfaced concerning the reasons why homeschooled students choose to enroll or not to enroll in Benedictine College. It was pointed out that some parents of prospective homeschooled students focus more on the morality of the campus environment than on the common characteristics related to college choice (e.g., academic reputation, cost, location, etc.). Many of the homeschooled students themselves have questions regarding the student life aspects of the college. Thus, I am interested in collaborating with the admissions, athletics, student life, academic, and communications departments to enhance the recruiting experience and meet the needs of homeschooled students.

The potential advantage I have in conducting this study is access to and consideration for homeschooled students, admissions staff, and other administrators. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) point out, the researcher's sincerity and authenticity is a significant factor to the interview process and must be established through the interviewer's honest and trustworthy interchange with the interview partner. My reputation at Benedictine College is one of trustworthiness and sincerity, and I attempted to execute these characteristics while interviewing the participants in this study.

Although I am very visible on the Benedictine College campus (e.g., work on campus, attend many campus-wide events, and eat with students in the cafeteria daily), the potential disadvantage that I have in conducting this study is my position as Vice President of Student Life. Students know me and because of my position at the college, participants may give me the answers that they think I want to hear. I overcame this by interviewing the participants during their freshmen year before I had gotten to know them well. During the interviews, I expressed to the participants the importance of honest responses and let them know how much their participation was appreciated. Also, I communicated to them how their responses have the potential to assist other Catholic homeschooled students in the college choice process.

Researcher Perspective

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the instrument. He or she brings values and assumptions to the study. These values and assumptions may influence the way the study is conducted or the conclusions drawn by the researcher (Maxwell, 1996). It will be important, therefore, that I identify anything that could bias the study, thus affecting the study's integrity.

My role as an administrator at Benedictine College is an area in which I interact with both homeschooled students and traditionally-schooled students. I have experience working with homeschooled students who are campus leaders, excel in the classroom, and interact with their fellow students in a healthy, positive manner. At the same time, I have experience working with homeschooled students who struggle with the adjustment from home to college life and do not interact in various campus activities. I realize that not all homeschooled students (like not all traditionally-schooled students) share the same

experiences. Therefore, I am open to diverse experiences and willing to see these experiences as valid.

Although my background is one of a traditionally-schooled student, I do not have any preconceived ideas about the participants in this study. I witness more and more of my colleagues and faculty members at Benedictine College choosing to homeschool their children. In fact, in the local area, there are over 120 children who are homeschooled, many who participate in cooperative homeschooling groups and have some association with the college (e.g., parent is a college professor or employee). Although I did not choose to homeschool my own children, I respect the time and commitment of these families in educating their children at home.

Sampling

Merriam (1998) suggests that when selecting a sample in qualitative research, the most common form is purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling involves intentionally selecting individuals who are information-rich cases for study in depth. The author argues that information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (p. 61). This technique is used in this qualitative study. I selected students who fit the criteria of being Catholic and homeschooled from among the total population of students who applied to Benedictine College in fall 2010.

In addition, Merriam (1998) suggests, “In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units” (p. 64). Likewise, Creswell (2005) suggests limiting the number of

participants interviewed for a study in order not to generate too much information for adequate analysis within a reasonable time. This is because every addition of a new person or site for a study reduces the ability of a researcher to provide in-depth information (p. 207). For this study, 25 participants are sufficient to reach redundancy of information. Also, this number enables me to obtain in-depth information from multiple viewpoints in order to generate meaningful results and draw well-supported conclusions from the study.

Protection of Human Subjects

Protecting human subjects is of paramount concern. Study participants must be assured of their rights to ethical issues such as privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, fair treatment, and protection from discomfort and harm (Creswell, 2005). Thus, I provided research participants with informed consent prior to involvement in the study. A detailed informed consent procedure was drafted, in accord with the human subjects' requirements of both the University of Kansas and Benedictine College.

Before conducting the personal interview, each participant signed a consent form to guarantee confidentiality and ensure that he or she was willing to participate in the study. I reminded the students that their participation was strictly voluntary and they could stop their participation at any time during the study without consequence to them. Also, I pointed out to the students that as a participant of this study, their name and responses remain confidential. In order to protect their anonymity, all study participants were assigned and referred to by pseudonyms.

Participants

After receiving approval from both the University of Kansas and Benedictine College's Institutional Research Boards, I contacted my Benedictine College colleagues to gain access to potential participants of the study. In particular, I met with the Vice President of Enrollment Management and obtained an initial list of potential participants and then contacted the Director of Institutional Assessment to process my request for demographic and contact information of all Catholic homeschooled students who applied to Benedictine College for the fall 2010 semester.

Once the demographic and contact information was gathered, I e-mailed all of the homeschooled students on the initial list to explain the study to them and request their participation. For those students who were interested in participating in the study, I contacted them again by e-mail as well as a personal phone call to explain the consent process, answer questions, and schedule an interview time and location. I continued this process until the total number of participants reached 15 Catholic homeschooled students who applied and enrolled in Benedictine College and 10 Catholic homeschooled students who applied to the college, but enrolled elsewhere. The students were identified as either Benedictine College or Non-Benedictine College students and findings were recorded accordingly.

Pilot Testing of Interview Questions

Prior to data collection for the study, I tested questions for participants by inviting four Catholic homeschooled students attending Benedictine College to participate in the pilot test. Participants included two sophomores, one junior, and a senior at the college.

I informed these students of the study for which the questions were designed and asked them to provide feedback on the interview protocol.

For the pilot interviews, I used a tape recorder and took occasional notes as necessary. I conducted the interviews in the same locale I used for the actual interviews. Participants were informed that their responses would be used to revise questions as needed. After the pilot interviews were completed, I made minor changes in the questions for clarity and omitted a few questions that were confusing to the students. However, the primary benefit to me as a researcher was the opportunity to polish my interviewing skills. The pilot interviews also improved my ability to listen and recall what the students were telling me. None of the data gathered from the pilot interviews were used for the actual study.

Data Collection

Two essential components and characteristics of qualitative data collection are the researcher and fieldwork. In this research approach “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). This allows for the data to be emergent in that the researcher has to respond to the setting and context of the study.

In this study, I collected data by person-to-person and telephone interviews during the spring 2011 semester. Each participant who applied to Benedictine College and enrolled in the college met individually with me in a public conference room in the Student Union for an interview that lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. For participants who applied to Benedictine College and enrolled elsewhere, I conducted

interviews that lasted approximately thirty minutes over the telephone at their convenience.

Additionally, I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol that provided a basic framework for data collection, allowing for consistency across interviews and for participant input to add to or redirect the interview process, where appropriate. According to Merriam (1998) semi-structured interviews offer researchers the opportunity to respond to new ideas or emerging worldviews presented by their respondents during the course of the interview. Likewise, Creswell (1998) suggests the interview protocol allows each participant to provide information that brings each student's individual experience to the overall collection of data.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) recommend that the structure of the interview consist of a main question, probes, and follow-ups that might emphasize different topics. Thus, many of the core questions in this study are complemented by a series of probing questions that added depth and detail to the participants' responses. I tape recorded and later transcribed for analysis all participants' interviews.

A demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) was administered to participants at the end of the interview sessions. It included information such as gender, age, race, religious preference, academic accomplishments, homeschool background, parental education level(s), parental occupation(s), and household family income. I used the information from the questionnaire to give context and background to participants' lives in order to establish a more holistic and comprehensive picture of their experiences and stories.

Data Analysis

Communicating and understanding are the goals of qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 1998, p. 193). For this qualitative study, the data analysis process included transcribing the interviews, organizing the raw data, and sifting through this data to classify and finally synthesize it.

Creswell (2003) suggests that there are three critical steps in preparing the data for analysis. First, the data must be organized and prepared for analysis. Inherent in this step is the transcription of all of the audio tapes. The second step is to read through all of the data to get a general sense of all of the information and to reflect on the overall meaning of the information before it is broken into sections during the coding process. The final step in preparing the data for analysis is the actual coding process. Therefore, when the interviews were completed, I transcribed the audio tapes and analyzed the data, by hand, to make sense of the information collected.

Making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning (Merriam, 1998). In coding my transcripts, I began by generating themes that emerged from the participants' responses. Interview transcripts and research literature on college choice were reviewed to identify reoccurring themes from which coding schemes were developed. These themes were developed by utilizing Creswell's method of dividing the transcribed interview data (with selected quotes) into segments, labeling the segments with codes, examining the codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapsing the codes into broad themes (Creswell, 2005, p. 237).

Additionally, I coded data by using several color and shape schemes to identify significant findings. Then I created tables to organize the data, which included the emerging themes. These themes were used to further analyze student interviews by comparing them to existing theories and previous studies on college choice.

Trustworthiness of the Data

According to Merriam (1998), there are six basic strategies to enhance internal validity: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research, and researcher's biases (p. 204). This study claims validity through member check and peer examination.

Specifically, I used member checking to establish if my participants felt that I accurately presented their views. After the interviews were transcribed, I e-mailed each participant a copy of my transcription. I asked them to review the text to confirm if I accurately represented their viewpoint. Once I received the participants' responses, I made the appropriate corrections to the transcription.

In addition, I asked a colleague in the Student Life Office at Benedictine College to serve as an auditor or second person who reviews the interview transcripts to determine if she perceived different themes emerging from the data. This colleague agreed to ask me thought-provoking questions and comment with interest on the interview transcripts. Also, she commented on the findings of this study as they emerged. This technique allowed me to have a "second set of eyes" analyzing data. Additionally, I consulted with the Dean of Students and Dean of Enrollment Management at Benedictine College regarding themes that emerged from the data. My dissertation chairperson, Dr. Lisa Wolf-Wendel, provided valuable insight and feedback as well.

Limitations

A major limitation to this study is the generalizability of the findings since the sample is from one institution, a small Catholic liberal arts college in the Midwest. The 25 Catholic homeschooled students represent experiences based on and influenced by their particular context and can be expected to differ for other sub-populations in other settings. Given its qualitative nature, the findings presented cannot be generalized to other settings or among other student populations. In addition, policies on tuition, financial aid, and admissions at small Catholic liberal arts colleges vary from college to college. Other limitations include the following:

1. The research was conducted with Catholic homeschooled students during their second semester of their freshmen year. For participants who enrolled in Benedictine College, their arrival and tenure at Benedictine may have influenced their perceptions of why they selected the college. Likewise, for participants who enrolled elsewhere, their reflections on their decision to attend another college may also be influenced by their experience at their selected college.
2. The research was conducted on Catholic homeschooled students who applied to an institution with 1,430 full time equivalent undergraduates, an average ACT of 24.1 and 2009-2010 tuition costs of \$19,500 (Benedictine College, 2009).
3. Due to sampling limitations, the research includes only data from 25 homeschooled students as participants of this study. These students are all of the Catholic faith, not ethnically diverse, and are all first-year students.

4. The researcher is an administrator at Benedictine College and therefore student responses may have been influenced by this relationship.
5. The researcher completed the research individually as opposed to a research team.

Summary

In Chapter Three, I discussed the research design, setting, and data collection and analyses procedures. This chapter also addressed the methods of verification for trustworthiness to ensure the integrity of the research and the limitations of the study. In spite of its limitations, the qualitative research design of this study has the power to contribute in a small way to the research regarding both Catholic homeschooled students and college choice. In Chapter Four, I provide the participants' responses and an analysis of the themes identified by the homeschooled students participating in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Chapter Four presents the research findings and the data analysis for this study. In this chapter, I use the words and stories of 25 Catholic homeschooled students who have gone through the college choice process. Although the participants came from a range of backgrounds and had varied experiences with college planning, various aspects of their experience were consistent and are presented here as composite findings.

The findings from this study answer the primary research question of how Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process as well as the more specific research questions: 1) What influences are most important in the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students? 2) Who is involved in the college decision making? 3) What role do Catholic homeschooled students' parents play in their college choice process? 4) What is the search process like in terms of resources used? and 5) What are the deciding influences affecting Catholic homeschooled students' choice of college? Findings are presented around the multiple themes that developed from recurring comments or ideas as described by the participants.

This chapter begins with a description of the participants based on the information they shared during their interview and data gathered from the demographic questionnaire. Next, I use Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three stage model of predisposition, search, and choice to help organize the material in this chapter. This model creates an effective way to report the data for this study in that it provides a framework for presenting the students' responses regarding their college choice and a general indication of timing of that choice. I conclude the chapter with a look at the participants' personal reactions to the college choice process.

Background Information

As indicated above, the research participants consisted of a group of 25 Catholic homeschooled students. Fifteen of the students applied to and enrolled in Benedictine College and 10 students applied to the college, but enrolled elsewhere. All participants were accepted to Benedictine College for fall 2010. On-campus interviews were conducted with the 15 students enrolled in Benedictine College from January 27, 2011 to March 8, 2011. These in-person interviews were conducted in the Moritz Conference Room located in the college's Student Union. During this same time, telephone interviews were conducted with 10 students who applied to Benedictine College, but enrolled elsewhere.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher asked each participant to complete an Informed Consent form (see Appendix C). The telephone interviews were approximately 30 minutes long, while the in-person interviews were longer in duration. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix D. A demographic questionnaire was distributed to each participant following the interviews (see Appendix E). Data were recorded separately under the two categories, Benedictine College and Non-Benedictine College students. However, after conducting the interviews and coding the data, it became apparent that the two groups of students followed the same process when choosing a college. Thus, I combined the data from the two groups in the research findings and did not separate the groups in my data analysis for this study.

Student Demographics

All participants were homeschooled and were of traditional age for their years in school. Sixteen of the 25 students were female, and nine were male. Whites/Caucasians

made up all of the participants; however, three students identified themselves as Filipino/American, Asian/Irish American, and German.

The students were all of the Catholic faith, with 13 students self-identifying themselves as Roman Catholic. The 25 participants were from 15 different states. Interestingly, no students were from the State of Kansas, which is where Benedictine College is located.

Table 1 in Appendix A provides further information about the homeschooled students in this study. All names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the students.

Academic Achievement and Family Characteristics

In order to present the most accurate depiction of the data, I obtained additional background information by asking the participants to complete a demographic questionnaire. Table 2, presented in Appendix B, includes information regarding the participants' academic achievements and family characteristics (i.e., SAT/ACT score, high school GPA, number of college credits received during high school years, number of family members, parental occupation and education level, and household income). This information gives the reader a better understanding of the composition of the student population that was sampled for this study.

In regards to academics, the 25 participants had a mean grade point average of 3.88 out of 4.0, and average ACT/SAT scores of 27 and 1,971 respectively. Notably, nine participants reported a 30 or above for their ACT or SAT equivalent score. Fourteen of the 25 students received college credit during their high school years, with seven receiving more than 10 hours of credit.

All homeschooled students in this study indicated their family included a mother and father living in the home. The number of children in these two-parent households ranged from 2 to 11 children with 12 students having at least five children in their family. Overall, the students came from families that averaged seven family members.

All participants, except for one, came from households where one or both parents had attended some college. In particular, of the 25 sets of parents (50 persons), 31 have at least a Bachelor's degree from college, including 13 who have a Master's or PhD/Professional degrees. Parental occupations included an engineer, accountant, teacher, business owner, medical doctor, geologist, airline pilot, lieutenant colonel in the Air Force, and homemaker, among others. Eleven students indicated both parents were employed and 14 students indicated one parent was employed and one parent, their mother, was a homemaker.

Of the homeschooled students who disclosed family income, the average household income was \$70,000 - \$79,999. However, eight students indicated they were not aware or chose not to respond. More importantly, 14 of the 17 students who answered this question reported an income of over \$50,000 with five students indicating an income of \$60,000 - \$79,000 and six students indicating an income of over \$100,000.

Homeschool Environment

I began each interview by asking the participants to describe their homeschooling experience. The students were very responsive and willing to tell their stories and participate in the study. They shared why their family decided to homeschool, how many years they were homeschooled, the type of curriculum they used, and their involvement with homeschool groups and co-ops.

Reasons for Homeschooling. Most of 25 participants, 20 students, indicated their families decided to homeschool 1) because they were either dissatisfied with the schools available in their area, 2) for religious reasons based on their faith values, 3) to provide a better education and social environment, or 4) for a combination of these three reasons. For instance, Jacob stated, “My family chose to homeschool because my mom thought we’d be getting a better education. They were displeased with some of the stuff that was being taught at the local school.” Andrew explained, “My mom thought we would receive a better education by homeschooling and she wanted to keep us with good family values.” This sentiment was widely held by the students in this study and was confirmed by Maura who said, “My parents homeschooled me all the way through because they have really strong values. They didn’t want me to have bad influences on my values by being in the school system. They thought if they taught us our regular courses that they’d teach us well. We would learn our values from them as our teachers.”

In addition, two participants mentioned health-related or learning disability reasons. One participant said her family began homeschooling because of encouragement from friends who homeschooled, one participant said her family wanted to provide individualized schooling, and one participant said his family homeschooled because of a disruption in the school schedule due to traveling.

Number of Years Homeschooled. The majority of the 25 participants, 17 students, were homeschooled for at least nine years; 11 students homeschooled their entire lives. Students who were not homeschooled exclusively had various experiences and attended both public and private schools. For example, Rose stated, “I went to a private school, St. Joseph’s, until third grade. In fourth grade, my twin sister and I were taken out of

school and we decided to homeschool.” John said, “For the first few years, kindergarten and first grade, I was at one public school. I attended second and third grade at a different public school. Then I went to a private school by our house for fourth and fifth grade. After that I was homeschooled.”

Academic Homeschool Curriculum. The participants described a variety of ways that their family utilized curriculum resources. Ten of the homeschooled students explained their families created their own curriculum during their grade school years, but utilized a set curriculum (i.e., Mother of Divine Grace, Seton Home Study, and Kolbe Academy Curriculum) and participated in homeschool co-ops and classes during their high school years. To illustrate, Monica explained, “Up until high school, my mom sort of made up the curriculum herself. She used pretty much the same curriculum for each of us, but she adapted it here and there. When I started high school, she enrolled me in an accredited homeschool group, Mother of Divine Grace, where she got the curriculum from them.”

Eight participants said their families used a set curriculum for their entire homeschooling experience. Elizabeth stated, “My mom has a day care, so she didn’t have time to just come up with a whole curriculum. We used Seton Home Study.” Five participants said their families mixed and matched different curricula or had no specific curriculum at all. For example, Laura said, “My mom did a lot of just picking from different sources. We did use some Mother of Divine Grace, but for the most part, we just chose different syllabi for different subjects. We didn’t use just one program.” Two participants said their families started with a set curriculum, but then created their own by mixing and matching different curricula. Bridget explained, “We started out with Seton

Home Study. Then over the years, my mom kind of used Seton as her base and used everything else to create her own unique thing.”

Social Homeschool Experience. When asked about their involvement in homeschool groups, 22 of the 25 participants responded they were active in a homeschool group or co-op. More specifically, 18 students expressed that they were very active; four students said they were involved, but not very active, and three students stated they were not involved in a particular homeschool group or co-op.

Comments from the participants varied widely. For instance, Lucy stated, “There’s a really great homeschool community where I live with a lot of young families and some older families too. It’s really great to have that variety and support. We get together and do field trips and have chemistry classes and chemistry experiments.”

Whereas Paul stated, “I was just nominally a member. They didn’t really have anything to offer for highschoolers. I did have homeschooled friends and those who went to private schools, so I could hang out with them even though I wasn’t actively in a co-op.”

A summary of the participants’ homeschooling experience is provided in Table 3 in Appendix F.

The Hossler and Gallager (1987) three stage model is a device I used to help organize the material in this chapter. At times, events from each of the three stages, predisposition, search, and choice, overlap as participants talk about their processes. This overlapping may be the result of either the retrospective nature of this study or because it may be possible for students to be involved in more than one stage at once, principally the search and choice stage.

Predisposition

To understand how Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process, one must understand students' predispositions, or attitudes toward attending college. During this first stage, predisposition, students make the decision to continue, or not continue, their education after high school. In this study, participants were asked questions about when they first started thinking about going to college, what made them start thinking about college, what influence their parents had on their decision to go to college, and why going to college was important to them. Three themes emerged from this inquiry. These were 1) development of the aspiration to attend college; 2) perceived benefits of college; and 3) parental influence. The following section will explore these themes concerning the participants' predisposition toward college.

Development of Aspiration to Attend College

A strong theme that developed through the interviews was that of the homeschooled students' aspirations to go to college to get a good job and be able to provide for themselves and their family. Over half of the participants expressed this desire and most of the students saw college as the next logical step after high school. This aspiration or ambition to attend college can be seen as predisposition toward college.

First Thoughts of College

Eight of the 25 participants aspired to go to college for so long that they could not identify a time at which they first started thinking of going to college. They indicated they always knew they were going to college. For instance, Maura stated, "I just knew that's what everybody did." Similarly, Jacob said, "I guess I kind of always thought that I'd go to college."

One student, Matthew, started thinking about college in third grade when he decided to become an engineer, but the majority of the participants indicated that they started thinking about college during high school. In particular, six of the students' first thoughts of college were during their freshmen year of high school. As Mark explained, "My dad got me started thinking about college when I was in my freshman year of high school. We had one of those talks – you're in high school now, you're getting older, you're going to be going to college in four years. You need to start thinking about what you want to do with your life." Nine students said they first started thinking of college during their sophomore year of high school when they took the PSAT, ACT, and/or SAT tests. As Martha stated, "It was right around the time when I was supposed to be taking my PSATs and SATs. I always kind of knew that I was going to go to college eventually, but I didn't really start thinking about it until tenth grade." One student, Andrew, started thinking about college later in his junior year of high school. He expressed, "I started pretty late."

Perceived Benefits of College

As previously indicated, 17 of the 25 participants decided to pursue college because they recognized a college degree was important to get a good job and be able to provide for themselves and their family. When asked why going to college was important, John responded, "To get a degree so that I would be able to get a job and not have to worry – to have a stable life. I also have relatives who haven't graduated from college and they definitely do not have the stable life. It's really affected them." Similarly, Clare replied, "To get a degree mostly. That way I can support myself later on." Interestingly, 12 of the 25 participants had chosen a career path during their high

school years and were going to college to seek training for that career. For instance, Anne said, “I’ve always wanted to become an archeologist. I knew that I have to go to college to do that.”

Additionally, six participants mentioned that going to college was important to them because of their desire to continue learning, in general. Lucy stated, “It was important to me to achieve greater education and fulfill my desire to learn.” Julia said, “I wanted to learn more and figure out more about myself and the world – just what’s out there.” A couple of the participants shared a broader view of the importance of going to college – one of a growing experience and a way to make a difference with the world. Rose explained, “I’m sure there are some people who can make it without a college degree, but for me, I thought that’s how I’m going to make a difference in the world. I can’t do it from standing there without a diploma. In order to make a difference, I have to have a degree to do something.”

Parental Influence

The participants became predisposed to college due to expectations set upon them by their parents. All 25 participants indicated that there was an expectation of their parents that they go to college. In fact, the language used to convey both the expectation to attend college and the results of a college education were fairly consistent among the homeschooled students in this study. Participants heard their parents share messages about the need to attend college to ensure job security. For instance, Elizabeth’s parents informed her of the difficulty of obtaining a good-paying job without a college degree. She commented, “My parents told me that they knew a lot of people who didn’t go to college and they always regretted it their whole life. Since college is so prevalent now,

there are a lot of jobs that you can't get just because you don't have a college degree. They always told me that 'you're going to college.'”

Several homeschooled students in this study commented on the emotional support and encouragement they received from their parents as they made postsecondary plans. Theresa expressed, “My parents definitely encouraged me to go to college. They didn't really consider that their kids were not going to go to college.” Similar sentiments were expressed by Laura who said, “They definitely encouraged me. Both of them went to college and got bachelor's degrees. My dad was going to start coaching me on the ACT test and different things. They were definitely encouraging me that I should go to college.”

Six of the 25 participants indicated that their parents encouraged them to go to college, but were okay with it if they decided not to go to college right after high school. These participants expressed that their parents gave them the freedom to choose whether or not to go to college. As Julia stated, “My parents always expected that we go to college. They were all right if we chose not to, but they would rather that we did. I just kind of always had the mindset that I would go.” Likewise, Catherine said, “They were happy with me wanting to go to college, but they also said if I wanted to take a year off, that was fine.” Paul explained, “It was assumed that I was going to go to college, but when I was voicing my concerns about it, my mom basically said, ‘okay, if you can present a good alternative then its okay.’ Obviously, there are no good alternatives! At the time I was thinking, ‘Oh wow, she's giving me an option.’ But as it turned out, college really was the only option.” Notably, three participants indicated that their parents took a more hands-off approach. As Maura shared, “They left it up to me about

the decision to go to college. I think they expected me to go, but if I had said, ‘Mom and dad, I really don’t think I should go to college because I want to be a nun they would have been fine with that.’”

Parental Education and Income

Although eight participants did not indicate their household income, based on the information provided regarding the participants’ average number of family members in the household, employment of the parents, and income levels, it can be assumed that most of the homeschooled students in this study are from middle class or above income families. Generally, students who are from middle class or above income families are more likely than other students to plan for and enroll in college while students from lower-income families are less likely than other students to reach their educational goals (Manski & Wise, 1983). To illustrate, the choice sets of all participants included only four-year institutions, which is consistent to research that has found higher economic status students are more likely to enroll in four-year institutions (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997).

Additionally, the results of this study support the existing research that asserts that students with higher incomes may place different values on what is important to them in looking for a college than those with lower family incomes (Delaney, 1998; McDonough, 1997). For instance, in this study, higher income students, such as John and Jacob, attributed more importance to the college’s surroundings and ambience, while lower income students, such as Maura and Martha, focused more on more practical issues, such as programs and costs.

Additionally, participants' parents who had college degrees and advanced degrees were familiar with the college search process and provided greater support and guidance. For instance, Monica stated, "My mom was the one who would sit down and research a lot of the colleges. She would go through it with me and we'd discuss it together." Similarly, participants' parents with higher incomes appeared to be somewhat more involved in the process. As John explained, "There was a discussion of finances. The result of that conversation my dad said, "Basically, if you really want to go here, if this is where you should be, then it will work out." For these participants, cost of attendance was not the deciding factor affecting the final choice of college.

Furthermore, some participants were influenced by their parents' own actions and personal higher education experience. These students described their parents reminiscing about their college experience and pursuing advanced degrees. Luke commented, "When I was growing up my parents were always talking about Steubenville, where they went to college. So when I was a kid I thought, 'I'm going to Steubenville, where my parents went.'" Rose revealed, "My mom actually went back and got her Master's degree when I was in seventh grade. For me, it was always like, 'she's going to college – I've got to go to college too.'"

Other Influential Persons Affecting College Aspiration

Four participants indicated an older sibling instilled the idea of college attendance in their minds. As Theresa stated, "I started thinking about college because my brother started talking about it." Another student, Bridget, said, "I started thinking about college when my oldest sister went to Magdalen College. That's when I started thinking about it. Not seriously, but I did recognize that I needed to start thinking about it because I was not

going there.” Monica shared, “I started thinking about college when my brother first went to college because I knew I was going to have to follow in his footsteps someday.”

A few participants expressed that other homeschooled students had an effect on their college aspirations. When asked what made her start thinking about going to college, Lucy stated, “It was basically my parents asking me what I wanted to do for my future career and just talking to some graduates that came from other colleges and some other homeschooled students that were in college.”

Search

Several aspects of each of the participants’ lives facilitated the development of their objectives to attend college. Their backgrounds, homeschooling experiences, parents, and other influential persons not only developed their college aspirations, but also began to develop their aspirations towards particular kinds of colleges (e.g., Catholic, liberal arts, private, etc.). In this section I will discuss how participants navigated through the second stage of the college choice process, search.

The search stage of the college choice process is the time in which students begin looking at various colleges. During this period, the participants focused on the types of colleges that they wished to consider and sought information about specific institutions. Near the conclusion of the search stage the students developed a choice set.

Three major topics emerged as particularly important to the search process of the homeschooled students in this study. These were 1) college characteristics; 2) resources used; and 3) influential persons. The following sections provide insight on these three matters.

College Characteristics

Characteristics of different colleges can either attract students or deter them from an institution. For the homeschooled students in this study, these characteristics included the type of college (i.e., good Catholic college), academic programs, cost of attendance, location, and size.

Catholic college – a “good” Catholic college

The opportunity to attend a Catholic college was an extremely important factor in the college search process of the homeschooled students in this study. In fact, 19 of the 25 participants indicated they were searching for a Catholic college to continue their education. More specifically, these students expressed the desire to attend a “good” Catholic college, one that provided them with opportunities to continue growing in their faith life. The participants used various words to define a good Catholic college. For instance, Anne used the words, “In line with the Church, kind of conservative.” Bridget referred to it as a “Super, solid Catholic college.” Luke used the term, “Solidly Catholic.” He stated, “Everything they do is based around the Church – a good vibrant Catholic life.” Andrew used the descriptive words, “Strong Catholic identity.” Theresa’s words were, “Really hard-core Catholic.” “Orthodox Catholic College” was how Jacob defined a good Catholic college. These students were searching for authentic and faithful Catholic colleges that embrace the Catholic faith. For example, when asked what was important to her as she began her search process, Monica stated, “I really, really wanted to go to a Catholic college. There are Christian groups on all campuses, but the actual feel of being surrounded by people that you know that share the same core values is something that was really important to me.” Likewise, Paul said, “I was interested in

going to a good Catholic school. At the beginning of my search, I couldn't pin down why I was interested, except that it was Catholic. Near the end of my search, I realized that I had all of these Catholic friends and a good Catholic community in Tallahassee and I wanted something like that. That was why I was really looking at Catholic schools.”

For students who had not chosen a major or didn't know what they wanted to do for a career, attending a Catholic college was an important influence on their college choice process. As Sarah indicated, “At first I wanted a Catholic school because I didn't know what I wanted to do. I wanted a Catholic school and I wanted it to be kind of small and just be homey.”

Role of the Newman Guide for Catholic Colleges. Nine of the 25 homeschooled students in the study indicated that they began their college search by checking the listing of 26 Catholic colleges in the *Newman Guide for Catholic Colleges*. As Julia described, “I looked through the Newman Guide. They had a long list of schools that were pretty strong Catholic.” This publication is available in print and on-line by the Cardinal Newman Society, an organization founded in 1993 to help renew and strengthen Catholic identity in Catholic higher education (www.cardinalnewmansociety.org).

According to the Cardinal Newman Society website, the *Newman Guide for Catholic Colleges* provides a profile examining each college's mission, governance, academics, spiritual life, student activities, and residential life. Each of these areas is evaluated for strength of Catholic identity. In this study, the *Guide* was respected among the participants as a reliable, trustworthy and useful source of information. This is evident in Luke's response when asked what he used to search for colleges. He replied, “The Newman Guide, of course.”

Academic Reputation and Program Offerings

An institution's academic reputation and the interest in a particular major or degree program was influential in the college search process of 18 of the 25 participants. Many participants began their searches by looking at what they perceived as good Catholic colleges and then narrowed down their choices based on those that offered the academic program that they were interested in. When asked what was important to him as he began his search process, John replied, "I think it was a combination of academics and faith. I knew that I wanted to go to a place that had a good academic background and also a very Catholic background." Likewise, Joseph stated, "I was looking for a great Catholic college with a great business program. That definitely narrowed down my search a lot."

Equally important to many participants was the quality of an institution's academic programs. When asked what attracted her to the colleges in her choice set, Clare explained, "I applied to South Dakota Technological University because it was ranked really high up in the rankings as one of the best engineering colleges. I wanted a really good top-of-the-line school." Similarly, Rose stated, "One reason why I was interested in Hillsdale was because they have really high academics. People refer to them as the Ivy League of the Midwest."

Additionally, several students mentioned their desire to participate in an honors program. As Jacob stated, "When I went to visit Catholic University of America (CUA), I found out they had an honors program. The academics and honors program were very good. I was attracted to the honors program because I knew I would get a good education through that."

Cost of Attendance

The cost of attendance and how to pay for college was a theme that came up with several participants during the search process. An overarching consideration for students as they searched for colleges, particularly when they neared the point of applying to different colleges, was financial aid and the opportunity to receive financial assistance to help them pay for college. By the end of the search process, 18 of the 25 homeschooled students in the study included at least one, more affordable, public university in their choice sets. Specifically, these participants applied to not only expensive, out-of-state private Catholic colleges, but also less expensive, in-state, public universities. By staying in-state many students were offered full-tuition scholarships and could receive state-based financial assistance.

A second common thought that students expressed about the cost of a college education was the need for as much financial assistance as they could get in the form of scholarships in order to make their college education affordable. Many participants mentioned that without an award of a scholarship the institution they most wanted to attend may be out of reach. For instance, when asked what was important to her as she began her search process, Maura responded, “I wanted to go to a Catholic college. I knew that might not be possible, financially, so I looked for Catholic colleges that gave substantial scholarships that I’d be eligible for.” Similarly, Lucy remarked, “I wanted to get a liberal arts, Catholic education so I was just looking for scholarship money and applying for as many things as I could.”

Other participants were genuinely considerate and realistic about the cost of attendance and searched for colleges accordingly. As Marie explained, “I wanted to

major in Theology so my options were pretty much private, Catholic colleges and most of them are pretty small. I did find a bigger Catholic college, but it was too much money. Actually, I knew that I had to start thinking about which one would be the cheapest.” Martha stated, “Because it is kind of a tradition in my family that parents pay for college, I really didn’t want something too expensive.”

Location

Six participants mentioned location was a factor when deciding what colleges to apply to during their college search process. For some students, location translated into where they would be most comfortable and where they would fulfill their desire to become more independent. For example, Matthew expressed, “I was looking for something that was far enough from home that my parents weren’t going to want to come visit me all the time, but close enough if I needed to go back home I could.”

Other students spoke of wanting to be closer to home for reasons including, among others: convenience, to save money, and to be near their family. As Catherine stated, “I considered going to the University of South Dakota (USD) because of location and price. I figured I’d be close to my family and I could go home and eat dinner, be with them, and stuff.”

Several participants who initially explored colleges regardless of location included nearby in-state colleges and universities as they came closer to the point of applying to different colleges (due to cost and location considerations). In the end, most students applied to a mix of colleges that were both close to and distant from their home.

The location of a college also provided some lighter moments during the interviews as when Rose described her experience of looking through a college brochure

that was sent to her in the mail. She explained, “I thought this looks really cool! I could really see myself going there. Then the other side of me would say, but it’s in Kansas! I would never hear the end of the Dorothy jokes if I would go there!” Mary said, “The only con for me, well actually, it was a big con being from California was, ‘Where the heck is Atchison?’”

Size

Six of the 25 participants indicated they considered the size of the institution while searching for a college. Many participants considered a college’s size when contemplating how good of a fit a college or university would be for them. For instance, Mary stated, “I started looking at colleges that were a little bit smaller because I felt like I’d be more comfortable with a small school, a private school probably.”

Andrew expressed how the size of an institution influenced his college search process. He stated, “Coming from being homeschooled and coming from Vermont, I assumed I would rather be in a small college setting. I initially was looking for colleges under 2,000 students, such as Christendom or other small Catholic liberal arts schools. But I also wanted a degree in business. Some of those schools didn’t offer that so I was kind of forced to look at larger schools.” Andrew’s comments illustrate how intentional participants were during their search process, specifically when it concerned combining a college’s size with other factors they considered important.

Sources of Information – Resources Used

The homeschooled students in this study used various informational resources to help inform and guide their searches, including the Internet, printed materials, word-of-mouth, and others.

Internet

The Internet was the most commonly used source of information for participants in this study. Websites of individual colleges and universities and search engines were mentioned most often. In fact, 19 of the 25 participants indicated that they used the Internet to initially gather information about various colleges. As Clare stated, “I used the Internet for a lot of it. I actually went on Spark Notes and just typed in what I was looking for. When the choices of colleges came up, I looked at them. Likewise, Sarah said, “I started talking to people, my friends, and other homeschooled people. I’d ask where they were going and stuff. Then I’d go to the websites and print stuff off and research everything.”

In general, many participants used the Internet to get information about academic programs at various colleges. For example, Paul remarked, “I searched all over the Internet. Ninety percent of my research was done online. The catalogs to the various universities are all available online.” Peter’s comments were similar. He stated, “I gathered information primarily through the Internet. Mostly colleges that sent me stuff. If I got a package in the mail, I’d check out the college. Usually I’d go online to see if they had a music program.”

Printed Materials

In addition to the Internet, participants consulted printed materials during their college search. Eleven of the 25 participants stated they began their college search by viewing college brochures and pamphlets received in the mail. The students read through the materials and followed up on colleges that were of interest to them. As Matthew explained, “I actually took the PSAT and after that colleges just kept sending me

information. That's really how I started searching for colleges. I would read their brochures and look through them and if something sounded interesting, I would register online." Similarly, Laura said, "I did pretty well on the PSAT, so I was getting a lot of brochures from colleges in the mail. I started following up on those colleges, going to the websites on the brochures, and researching them."

Rose's experience was unique, but similar to that of Matthew and Laura. As she described, "I started searching for colleges after I took my ACTs and SATs my junior year. I made a mistake after I took my test. I thought the box said, 'Check if you don't want things sent to you', but it said, 'Check if you do want things sent to you.' It was ridiculous – every day a different pamphlet in the mail. At that point, I was like, 'Wait, I don't have to just go to one of my local colleges, these are all options for me!' That's when I really started investigating, going to websites, and looking through the pamphlets." Likewise, Jacob said, "When I took the PSAT, they began sending me a bunch of college brochures. It kind of exposed me to the different kinds of colleges that were out there. As they sent me stuff, I'd look them over. The ones that I'd heard about or were interested in from the Newman Guide and other places, I'd do more research on them through the Internet and try to find out more about them, the application process, and such."

However, one student, Luke, indicated that college brochures and pamphlets were not an important resource. He stated, "When you start taking the SATs and ACTs, all of these colleges get your information. The next thing you know, the weekend after you take the tests you just get swamped by colleges that you have never heard of before."

Quite frankly, I didn't have any interest in them. I went through all of them and pushed the unsubscribe button and got rid of them.”

As previously stated, participants also checked college listings in Catholic publications, such as the Newman Guide and/or National Catholic Register. As Maura said, “I knew that there would be a guide to Catholic colleges coming out in the National Catholic Register, which is a newspaper that we get at my house. When I got it, I went through the list of colleges online to see if they had Spanish and if they had scholarships. I also looked at how the colleges were viewed in the newspaper, how Catholic they were, and stuff like that.”

Word-of-Mouth

In addition to print information about colleges, either electronic or paper, homeschooled students in this study gathered information from the people with whom they interacted. Family, friends/peers, friends of the family, and admissions counselors all provided information to the students. For example, when asked about the resources she used during her college search process, Martha replied, “My homeschool friends – the other people that I know who are homeschooled. I tried to find out about some good Catholic colleges through them. There was also a priest at my church who used to work at Thomas Aquinas College. He was trying to get me to go there, but they don't have a music department. I also talked to the faculty over the phone and emailed admissions about the admissions process.”

Other Resources

A few participants used other resources as well. For instance, Andrew described how he began his search process by stating, “I used the SAT website to begin my search.

Before you take the SATs, they have a website where you can do practice tests. You can also create an account and search through their database of colleges and enter criteria. So basically you can search by religious affiliation, student population, and pretty much anything you want. It will give you a list of colleges that fit them. I used that to try to get an idea for some colleges.” Additionally, one participant used a college guide book and one participant used a county college handbook while searching for a college.

Influential Persons

Many people were present throughout the participants’ college search process, some assisting the students by gathering information and some by just offering support and advice. Admittedly, some of these influential persons were more helpful than others, but the collective feedback was beneficial to the participants. For the homeschooled students in this study these persons included their parents, older siblings, friends/peers, friends of the family, and admissions counselors.

Parents

During the interviews, 22 of the 25 participants indicated that their parents were supportive and encouraging throughout their college search process. Participants often spoke of the emotional encouragement and support that they received from their parents as they navigated their search process. For instance, Bridget shared, “My parents were super supportive about the whole Benedictine thing. It was a little bigger in size than some of the other schools. They were really looking at it with me and really supportive about coming to visit with me. With applying they were all for it.” Sarah remarked, “My parents were very supportive of me going to college. They did everything they could to help me.”

In addition, many parents served as sources of information and provided hands-on assistance to participants as they searched for colleges. Students shared numerous stories of how their parents helped them by providing specific types of information regarding college qualifications and college planning. Clare stated, “My dad definitely played a big role. We spent a lot of time searching like, ‘this is a good one and this is not.’ He knew all the good engineering schools.” Similar sentiments were shared by Mary, who said, “I talked to my dad a lot about it because he knows mostly about softball. He helped me look at which colleges had good softball programs that I was looking for.” While describing the support she received from her parents, Elizabeth offered, “I sort of just looked on my own and then my mom helped me to get information about different colleges and stuff. Mom also went on my campus visit with me and helped with the financial aid part.”

Additionally, participants described how their parents provided advice and critiques, acted as a sounding board, and talked about options. Laura remarked, “My parents were definitely helpful. They were doing research on their own also. They were comparing notes with me and then just giving me input. They gave me kind of an outside perspective of where they thought I would fit in and that kind of thing.” Monica shared, “I wasn’t too excited to start thinking about college, of course. It was my mom, she was the one who would sit down and research a lot of the colleges and she’d say, ‘Okay, Monica, look at this one, this one looks pretty good.’ She would go through it with me and we’d discuss it together. I really don’t know what I would have done without that.”

Parents also provided monetary support to cover many of the costs associated with the college search process. These efforts included, among others, accompanying the

participants to college visits, paying application fees, and assisting them with financial aid and scholarship applications. For example, Lucy said, “We would hear about a scholarship day at some college and even though my mom has health problems and she can’t eat any food out and complicated situations like that, they still sacrificed all of their time and money to drive me to every single school that I looked at.”

The majority of the participants spoke of conducting their college search independently, but receiving assistance from their parents when needed. The parental approach of gently guiding participants during the search process and helping students maintain independence was very common. When asked about the role his parents played in his search process, Mark explained, “My mom and dad, my dad especially, was very into the whole college thing because he wants me to have a good education. He didn’t do things for me because he wanted to teach me responsibility, but he kept reminding me and kept pushing me towards it. I don’t think I would have done anything if he hadn’t. So they kind of let me do it on my own, but they were there when I needed help. They let me learn responsibility that way.”

Conversely, six participants indicated that their parents left the search process up to them entirely. As Andrew explained, “I did my college search almost entirely independently. My mom gave me some suggestions, she showed me the article in the Register, but it was pretty much up to me to research each college and decide if I wanted to go there or not.” Three additional participants indicated their parents expected them to go to college, but left the entire college choice process up to them (i.e., the decision to attend, search, and choose a college).

Older Siblings

In addition to parents, other family members such as older siblings played an important role in the college search process of seven of the 25 participants in this study. These participants had older siblings who were either enrolled in a Catholic college or had recently graduated from a Catholic college. As with their parents, the students were the immediate beneficiaries of the resources and college knowledge made available to their older siblings. Theresa explained, “All of my family members older than me went to different schools, so I could compare which Catholic school was best of those. My oldest brother went to the University of Dallas. My sister went to Thomas Aquinas College. Then my brother went to Christendom.” Likewise, Andrew said, “I looked at colleges where my friends and older siblings and their friends had gone to. It definitely was not a very thorough search by any means. Eventually, my sister, who lives here in DC said to me – you should look at Catholic University.”

Friends/Peers

Ten of the 25 participants talked about their friends/peers’ influence during the college search process. The unique role and influence of friends varied for each participant. For a few participants, their friends were very opinionated and pressured them as they searched for colleges. For instance, Sarah said, “My parents – they just let me decide. They didn’t care either way. But my friends, they were like, “oh, you have to go here – yeah, there was a lot of pressure. Like, oh, that’s not a good enough school for you.” Likewise, Mark said, “All my friends in Montgomery would never come this far to go to college. They were all going to go to Auburn or Alabama, most likely. They tried to influence me to not come here.” Other participants described how their friends/peers

provided helpful information and advice during their search process. As Maura stated, “I have some friends who are older than I am who went to Catholic colleges so I’d ask them questions about their schools. One of my friends went to a scholarship competition at Benedictine College and I rode with her.” Yet for still other participants, such as Lucy and Luke, friends played a more limited role. As Lucy stated, “It was kind of between me and my parents. A lot of my friends were just going to in-state schools or community colleges to start out. I was looking into more schools that were out-of-state. So it was more between me and my parents.” Based on these statements and other similar remarks, it was apparent that the friends/peers of homeschooled students in this study played a somewhat minimal role in their college search process.

Friends of the Family

The participants used other people, friends of the family, as resources and as a means of gathering information as well. These people included homeschooling families, parishioners, priests, and others. During the interviews, seven of the 25 participants spoke of finding out about different colleges through talking to friends of the family. The students indicated the range of assistance went from words of wisdom and specific information given about college to advice about the Catholic identity of a particular college. Participants trusted these friends and relied on them for information and advice, especially in regards to which colleges were “good Catholic colleges.” For example, when asked how she began searching for colleges, Bridget replied, “It was a lot of word-of-mouth from friends of the family who had gone to schools that I liked. It is kind of like...within small Catholic communities, they all have the small Catholic colleges kind of picked out already for you. So I heard about Benedictine and looked it up online and

checked out all of the majors offered.” Marie’s response was typical of the participants who relied on others to find out about Catholic colleges that they were considering. She said, “I started mostly by talking to other people because I knew a lot of families and other people who had gone to different Catholic colleges across the country. So I gathered information from my friends and other people. I contacted the colleges and used the Internet and read up a little bit on them.”

Five participants used their acquaintances within their churches and homeschooling networks to gather information while they searched for colleges. Although they were not family or close friends, these individuals functioned like family and did not hesitate to offer much needed support and assistance. For example, when asked how she decided to apply at Benedictine College, Mary replied, “I knew a lot of people who were actually here already. There are a few parishioners that come here, like the Porretta family is from my church. I talked to them about it and we talked to their parents about what they thought about Benedictine and stuff.” Another student, Mark, described how his parish priest influenced his search process. His story follows: “I was looking online for the top Catholic colleges and I think Benedictine was one of the top three or four at the time. That was the first time I heard about the school and we looked at its website and thought, ‘Oh that looks cool’ and put it aside. Then my parents’ parish priest out of Montgomery felt called to be a monk. So he went to all of the different monasteries and the Abbey here was his favorite. He came back and came to our house for dinner one night and said, ‘Mark, you need to check out this college.’ He was like, ‘Benedictine’ and I said, ‘Hey, I heard of that – it’s one of the top Catholic schools.’ He said, ‘It’s amazing! It’s got masses four times a day, it’s got perpetual adoration, and it’s

got an amazing campus, a great school.’ So I was like, ‘Okay, cool.’ I started looking into it.” As illustrated by the above stories and comments, several participants used the actions and advice of friends of the family to help determine what was important to them as they went through the college search process. These considerations made the college experience more real for the participants, which was invaluable in narrowing down the colleges that were desirable to them. Additional persons that served in this capacity for at least one participant were an Art teacher, boss, and a Mother of Divine Grace counselor.

Admissions Counselors

During the interviews, five of the 25 participants specifically mentioned their college admissions counselors as influential persons while searching for a college. As Anne revealed, “The admissions counselors helped me a lot. I really didn’t know what I was doing.” Participants also told stories of how receiving individual assistance and constant communication from an admissions counselor played an important role in their college search. For instance, Joseph expressed, “I’d say definitely most colleges don’t have the personal relations that Benedictine does. I had the same admissions counselor who talked to me every time. She gave me helpful information and called me every couple months. The personal touch is definitely very important. The other schools I just got something in the mail every couple of months, but here (Benedictine) I got stuff in the mail, I got emails, they called me, and invited me to call them whenever I had any questions.”

As important as a welcoming and helpful admissions counselor can be to a homeschooled student, a negative experience can have a potentially damaging effect as well. For two participants, indifferent or unfriendly service impacted them negatively.

As Mary, explained, “With other colleges, not Benedictine, it was a lot harder to get into contact with them, especially the athletic people. Even the admissions people! They didn’t send out very many things. With Benedictine, people would call me all the time and I would get mail and emails from them. It was really easy to contact people at Benedictine. Communication was very important.”

Limitations during the Search Process

During the interviews, over half of the participants, 14 students, indicated that they had some trouble during the search process. Participants indicated that being a homeschooled student worked against them in terms of being offered scholarships. The students indicated that scholarships were not awarded to them because they lacked some of the official documents. As Catherine stated, “When I applied for scholarships, like local scholarships, I had trouble because they required a certain GPA and a school transcript, which excluded homeschoolers. But I did find some.”

Additionally, the participants said that they had transcript problems during their college search. These participants did not have an official transcript as students who attended an accredited high school. Thus, they faced some challenges obtaining an official transcript for the application process. Matthew explained, “There wasn’t anything official set up, so we kind of had to develop our own transcript. Because of the kind of schooling that we did, all of my grades were based on how confident I was with the subject field. I took fewer subjects, but the ones I took I was good at.” Likewise, Rose expressed, “I did struggle with people understanding and accepting my transcript. The one thing that we did during my senior year in high school was that we went through the Mother of Divine Grace program, which was very helpful. My diploma says graduate

from Mother of Divine Grace. That was good, but I still had some issues with certain people because they weren't as accepting of it."

Also, participants indicated that not having someone to help guide them and their families through the college application and scholarship process was a hindrance during their search process. For example, Clare said, "I am the oldest, so my mom and dad weren't really sure how to cope. I wasn't really sure. It would have been really awesome if I could have had someone to help me during the fall of my senior year when I should have been applying for these things. I just kind of put it out there and let it sit for a while. I still got scholarships, but I wish that I would have started sooner." Similarly, Marie expressed, "I did feel like I was limited because I didn't have an aid to help. Someone to push you and say 'now you need to do this...' I knew because I was homeschooled that I needed to do this on my own." However, as John pointed out, "I don't think there were things that limited my search process, but I don't know what the relationship would be like having a high school advisor."

Finally, many homeschooled students in the study expressed a sense of not knowing what to do about financial aid. In particular, there was a lack of familiarity of the timing and steps associated with applying for scholarships. As Anne stated, "I really didn't know what I was doing. My two older sisters had gone to college, so my mom pretty much knew – she helped a lot."

While not in great numbers, other participants felt that there were some limitations in the search process that included distance (e.g., campus visit opportunities), lack of information on colleges, lack of contact with colleges, unclear homeschool policies, and a lack of money.

While searching for a college or university, participants relied on the information that was available to them. They consulted a range of materials and persons in their search for information about various institutions. Although some students expressed limitations during the search process, students formed a choice set. The next section of this chapter outlines the deciding influences affecting their ultimate choice of college.

Choice

Choice is the final stage of the process. During this time, students decided which colleges they would ultimately attend. This involved evaluation of the colleges and universities that remained in the students' choice set. Six major topics emerged as particularly important to the choice experience of the Catholic homeschooled students in this study. These were 1) cost of attendance; 2) academic programs; 3) campus climate; 4) location; 5) divine intervention; and 6) parental influence. The following section provides insight on these influences affecting the participants' final choice of college.

Deciding Influences Affecting College Choice

As discussed in the previous section, the homeschooled students in this study considered factors and characteristics that were important to them when selecting colleges in their choice set. In particular, the choice sets of 15 participants included over three colleges. As a whole, 23 of the 25 participants applied to at least one other Catholic college besides Benedictine College. Eighteen participants applied to at least one Catholic college and one public research university. The students narrowed down the colleges in their choice set by considering the influences that were of greatest importance to them.

Cost of Attendance

For all participants, the cost of higher education was an important consideration when making their college choice. For 11 of the 25 participants, the cost of attendance was a deciding influence affecting their final choice of college. When reflecting on how to pay for college, these students stated that they sat down with their parents to discuss scholarships, loans, their overall financial aid package, and/or reducing tuition by attending a nearby in-state public university. For example, when asked what influenced her final decision, Monica replied, “It was just the financial piece – the actual cost of attendance. Definitely something where my parents knew where I really wanted to go and I could understand that financially it would be really, really difficult. My brother is in college and my younger sister will also be going to college soon. We talked about it a lot, but we all agreed it just would not be easy or even possible. It was pretty much a mutual decision.” Likewise, Marie responded, “It came down to the money. I ended up getting an offer for a full-tuition scholarship from the University of St. Thomas. I didn’t want to go to the University of St. Thomas, but I talked to my parents about it and thought about it for many months because I knew that I couldn’t pass up the offer.”

In addition, many participants expressed general concerns about the financial burden of college attendance and considered their family’s financial situation when deciding where to go to college. In particular, 14 of the 25 participants mentioned “scholarship” or “paying for school” sometime during the interview. Several participants competed in presidential scholarship competitions and waited to make their final college choice decisions until after receiving word of the scholarship award. As Maura stated, “I

applied to Benedictine College, but I was in a scholarship competition and didn't win it. So it was out of my range – money-wise.”

More commonly, participants described a concern about cost and seeking scholarship monies, but expressed a willingness to take on loans and go into debt if it meant going to the college of their choice. Most homeschooled students in this study described real efforts of applying for scholarships and praying they would receive the scholarships to save money. To illustrate, Mary expressed, “It was a really hard decision actually because I liked both colleges a lot. Benedictine offered me more athletic money and Concordia didn't. Benedictine guaranteed me money to go here, so that was a big thing.” Ultimately, cost did matter; but cost concerns were manifested differently for each participant.

Academic Reputation and Program Offerings

Of the 25 homeschooled students participating in this study, 10 students indicated that an institution's academic program was a deciding influence affecting their choice of college. Particularly, seven students had a specific college major in mind when they made their final decision. For these students, comparing different academic program offerings was effective in narrowing colleges in their choice set. As Paul, expressed, “Unfortunately, many of the Catholic schools in the *Newman Guide*, which were particularly faithful, were really small with degrees in humanities or something. They didn't have history programs or their history programs are very small and limited. I wanted to go somewhere with a wider scope.” This availability of academic programs that participants were interested in was very influential in the students' decisions-making.

Additionally, while difficult to measure and mostly determined by word-of-mouth, participants viewed academic reputation as an important factor in selecting a college. As Jacob explained, “So in the end, I was considering between the University of Dallas and Benedictine. The two schools are similar in a lot of ways, but kind of different. They are both smaller, orthodox Catholic colleges. In the end, it seemed like Dallas had – I don’t want to say better academics – but, it seemed like the program would suit me more. They had very good academics as well as I was attracted to their study abroad program.”

Campus Climate – the right “fit”

All participants mentioned campus climate as an important factor in selecting a college. The emphasis on climate was focused primarily on fit. Participants often talked about the “feel” or “fit” of an institution as shaping their college choice process. More specifically, “the right fit” was a frequently cited response of participants when asked what influenced their final decision. In fact, 11 of the 25 participants indicated “it just felt right” or “it was the fit” that made the difference. Lucy described this sentiment as she explained, “Franciscan was just a better fit. It wasn’t anything that I particularly dislike at Benedictine. It was just when I was there and praying about it, it just didn’t feel right. It was kind of a more ‘go with your gut instinct.’ I basically fell in love with every aspect of the whole community and the academia that was at Franciscan. Basically, it just kind of felt right. It just kind of clicked.” Theresa said, “I really liked the biology teacher that I met here. I liked the girl who was showing us around campus and the kids that I met with my cousin. It seemed like it would be a really good fit.” Matthew stated, “I came for a visit one time with my dad. He saw the campus, I saw the campus, and we

fell in love with the way it looked. I told him I really wanted to go here. A lot of it was the look of campus – it felt natural, a campus on the hill, a lot of trees, grass, and open spaces. At Missouri S & T, I’ve driven through and it’s all buildings. Some buildings have really pretty architecture, but it’s all buildings. I felt Benedictine was a better fit for me.”

Unique to a Catholic college is the faith-based opportunities provided within the campus environment. For at least seven participants, the faith opportunities and vibrant faith life on campus were viewed as an important part of the campus culture. These students indicated that opportunities to practice their faith on campus influenced their decision-making. Clare explained, “I just started thinking about what I really thought would be most important. I decided that God should be at the top of that list. I thought at South Dakota, I would have to work much harder. It would be a lot easier to think I have to get a taxi to go to Mass, no one is going with me, and I’m just not going to go today. I knew here, at Benedictine, there would be no excuse to not go to Mass.” Put more simply, Mary stated, “Just thinking about a Catholic college – that was huge. I’d feel more comfortable and be able to grow more here.” Elizabeth commented, “The most important thing was that it was Catholic. Then it was just the community. I really wanted a place where I could just be myself.”

Importance of Campus Visit

By searching the Internet and reviewing college brochures, participants were able to connect to colleges and universities across the nation. Even so, most homeschooled students in this study took advantage of opportunities to visit college campuses and meet with admissions counselors and other representatives. By visiting the various colleges,

students were able to define and narrow their searches in a much more meaningful way. Eleven of the 25 participants indicated that the campus visit positively impacted their final decision. As Bridget stated, “The final decision was just visiting the campus – seeing how beautiful it was and how much I felt at home here. That was really, really big. It’s only 500 miles away from home, a little closer than the other colleges I was considering.” Anne’s description of her campus visit experiences illustrated the impact of a campus visit. She explained, “At Washburn, they were a little indifferent about me being there, it seemed. When I called, they were nice enough, but when I got there they were like, ‘Okay, this is here, this is there...’ It was very scripted and rather boring. They were like – ‘We really want you here,’ but I was like – ‘Not really.’ I didn’t get that individual attention. It was sort of the same at the University of Arkansas. That was probably the most boring tour of all. People here are so much different than there. When I visited Benedictine, as soon as I stepped into the admissions office, they were happy to see me, personally. J.P., my admissions counselor, was awesome.” Likewise, Paul stated, “I think I really decided immediately after the campus visit – it really sealed it for me. History program, emphasis on faith, Newman Guide school, and the fit, it just felt right.”

In addition, several participants commented on how the campus visit influenced their parents as well. For instance, Mary commented, “My mom actually liked Benedictine more than I did on our visit. She was like – this is definitely the one. I was more cautious, coming into Atchison. I was like, ‘Oh my gosh! This is not going to work out.’ Kind of a culture shock! After I left Benedictine, that’s when I was thinking about it more and I was like – I can kind of see myself going there more. But when I first

got here, I was still kind of in the cautious state – still in the shock of Atchison.”

Interestingly, all but one of the participants who applied to Benedictine College and enrolled in the college visited the campus before making their final decision. However, only half of the participants who applied to Benedictine College and enrolled elsewhere visited the campus before making their final decision.

Location

Location and distance from home were important factors influencing the college choice process of several participants. In particular, 10 of the 25 participants identified the location of a college as important in their decision making. Some students wanted to attend college close to home while some preferred to attend school away from home. To illustrate, Laura stated, “I think the main things that really influenced my final decision were the price and the closeness to home. Being close to home was kind of the thing that tipped the scales.” Whereas Clare said, “It was important for me to be away from home because with six younger siblings I knew I wouldn’t be able to do any homework for college.”

Other participants considered location important because they wanted to attend college in a vibrant city or a more urban setting versus a rural setting. Also, three students looked at location as a factor to enhance their educational and professional goals. As Jacob explained, “Once I was in the city, I was attracted to being in the city that was the United States capital and being able to get job internships and all the opportunities that come with being in the middle of the city. I liked being able to travel in the city and visit monuments and local things of interest and stuff. That’s why I decided to come here.” Andrew said, “I was attracted to the location in Charleston. It is a developing

city, so it's got more opportunities for internships and jobs there." Julia commented, "I ended up picking CUA (Catholic University of America) because it was in a better location for what I wanted to do. It was also a bigger school, which helps me a little more academically."

Divine Intervention

Over one-third of the homeschooled students in this study expressed that God's will was a deciding influence affecting their choice of college. Nine participants spoke openly about their final decision being made by God, making a prayerful decision, or being called to attend a particular college. For instance, Peter stated, "I don't think there was anything in particular that influenced my final decision. To be truly honest it was entirely by the hand of God. I otherwise would not have gone here; I would have gone to the community college of OSU or the University of Cincinnati if I had enough language credits. But, I just felt like this was a good school although I didn't visit. The first time I saw it was at SOAR weekend (i.e., summer registration)."

Likewise, Luke explained, "It was a discernment thing. I got to hand it to the people at Christendom. A lot of my friends had applied to Christendom and were going there. I explained my quandary to them and one young lady put it really perfectly, she said, 'Luke, we've been talking with each other and we know you want to come here and we want you to come here, but in the end it's not what you want to do. But it is what is best for you and your family and what God wants you to do.' That was kind of a slap across the face, wake up and smell the coffee brother. She was a friend who was at Christendom – that kind of put things in a different perspective. So I started praying

about it and I figured for various reasons that God wanted me to come here to Benedictine. I made my final decision through prayer and friends.”

Several participants spoke about praying for guidance while making their final college choice. Maura stated, “It was a really hard decision for me. I prayed about it a lot and I really thought that I was supposed to go to DeSales. That’s what I wanted to do kind of all along anyways. So I ended up picking there.” While making his final decision, Mark explained, “I went up to my room and I prayed for a little while – what do I choose?” Rose’s story revealed similar sentiments. She shared, “What it was, I was sitting there and I had to think to myself. We were talking about it on my plane ride home and my mom asked, ‘if you get the scholarship are you going to go?’ Financially, it would be the dumbest thing in the world not to go. But after praying about it, I thought ‘If I get it, it’s a sign that I need to go here and that’s what I need to do. I’m letting God take care of this. If He wants me to go here, He’ll make it okay for me to go.’ Then, when I found out that I got the presidential scholarship, I was overwhelmed. I cried when I found out. I was so lucky that my family had not converted completely to cordless phones. I was standing in my kitchen and I got the call at 8:00 that night. Katie, from admissions, called and said, ‘I just want to congratulate you.’ I completely dropped the phone and fell to the ground. Luckily it was dangling and I was sitting on the ground talking to her and crying. I thought God just relieved all of my fears and anxieties.”

When asked what influenced her final decision, Marie explained, “I ended up going on a retreat in Nashville at a convent. I decided there over the weekend. I just prayed about it and talked to a lot of amazing people. They told me basically – you’ve got to use the prudence that God gave you to make a judgment and if that is not what he

wants for you then he'll let you know. That really meant a lot to me. You know, God gave me this judgment and I'm going to use it. I'm going to go to the University of St. Thomas. If he wants me to go get into debt, he's going to have to – make it happen.”

Another student, Lucy, stated, “It was basically me praying about it and really thinking deeply about what I wanted to accomplish my freshman year of college and beyond. It really came down to what I felt that God was calling me to do and what I wanted to do. Eventually, I just made the decision that I want to go away to school, I want to learn, and I want to pursue the Communications and Humanities major. If there is another dancing opportunity for me later, I would be very open for that, but I just felt it was time to take a break. I wanted to discover and take a leap of faith. So eventually even though I was kind of uncertain and nervous at first about it, after I made my deposit and everything for school, it was the best decision that I ever made. I am so happy!” Finally, John said, “Benedictine was where I really wanted to come. It had that faith element that I was looking for and it also had all four of the degrees that I was looking for. Then just personally, being here I truly realize every day that this is where I was called to be.”

Parental Influence

In regards to parental influence, support and encouragement while providing a sense of independence was a running theme that existed throughout the interviews. Parents appeared to be confident in their child's ability to navigate the college choice process. At the same time, the participants' decisions and actions reflected their family values. Although all participants articulated the idea that they made the choice to attend college, conducted a search, and decided on their college of choice, the influence of their

parents and established family values were evident throughout the process. For instance, Mark said, “After making my decision, I came downstairs and told my mom that I’d chosen Benedictine out of the two. She started to cry and called my dad. He was so happy that he started to cry on the phone (out of happiness). He was like, “I was hoping that you’d choose Benedictine. I know it’s far away, but it’s a good school.”

While making their final college choice, 10 of the 25 participants indicated that their parents were very supportive in the process and did not feel pressured by them. For instance, Anne stated, “We did talk about it a lot. My family talks about everything. But really in the end they said ‘it is your final decision – we can’t make it for you.’ So I just sort of slept on it and thought ‘I have to go to Benedictine.’” When asked about her parents’ role in her final college decision, Laura said, “We made it together. They were really involved the whole time, which was really nice. The whole time there was a lot of time just talking about it, going over the pros and cons and trying to decide, because none of us were sure where I would be happier.”

Seven participants stated their parents provided them advice and critiques of the students’ choice set and expressed their concerns, preferences, and opinions. As Julia stated, “My parents left it up to me to make my final choice. My mom said that she thought I should go to CUA (Catholic University of America), but she said I could do whatever I wanted.” Similarly, Maura said, “My mom went on the visits with me and I would talk things over with her about what we’d seen and what I was thinking. But she really tried not to influence my decision. She left it up to me.”

Interestingly, six participants stated that their parents left the decision up to them, but added their parents would have said something if they disagreed. As Joseph

described, “My parents basically stayed out of it completely. They just decided to let me go with it and then if they really disagreed, they would have probably told me. But they both really loved the campus.” Bridget’s comments followed this theme, “They were huge supporters of me. It was my choice. They would have said something if I wanted to go to a school that they were really uncomfortable with. But my dad really liked Benedictine.”

In the final choice stage, many participants said that they could depend on their parents to provide them with the financial guidance necessary to make sense of their college choice process. Consequently they saw their parents as important sources of information regarding finances as they attempted to sort out their college plans. During the interviews, 11 of the 25 participants explained how they sat down with their parents and went over finances before making their decision. As Andrew explained, “We definitely sat down and discussed my three top choices and looked at the finances. Once I got the okay from my parents that we could afford each college, it was just up to me to decide where I wanted to go.”

Based on the above statements and countless others, there was no denying the influential roles of the participants’ parents. Whether providing encouragement and support, financial assistance, information, guidance, or independence, parents played unmistakable roles that impacted how participants navigated the college choice process.

Other Influences Affecting College Choice

At times, the role of older siblings replaced parents as sources of information when parents were not able to assist participants with the nuts and bolts of the college choice process. Older siblings who had some higher education experience were able and

willing to transmit important college-related resources and knowledge to participants. Participants shared various college experiences with their older siblings and gained knowledge and information that influenced their college choice process. For instance, John revealed, “Personally, I went on campus visits when my brother Peter went on campus visits. One year we actually made it our summer vacation to go around the nation and look at colleges.”

In addition, many participants seemed to listen to their friends/peers, but were mature in making decisions independently. As Laura stated, “We did talk about schools a lot. A lot of my friends were applying to the same places. It just came down in the end to where each of us thought it would be best. Some of my friends wanted to go away to school and be in a new city. I wanted to stay close to home. So based on those things, we ended up going to different colleges.”

Lastly, a story told by Elizabeth illustrates the influence that a welcoming and helpful admissions counselor can have on a student’s college choice process. She explained, “So when I went to visit here (Benedictine), I just had a surgery and I couldn’t walk. I called down ahead of time to ask if I could still come. They were like, ‘Oh yeah, we’ll get a go-cart for you, we’ll put everything on ground floor, we’ll let you go through the tour, and everything.’ I just could not believe that they would still let me come visit. So we came and visited here and I just fell in love with it. There was no way that I could go anywhere else! I visited Benedictine before Steubenville, so we didn’t need to visit there. I’d made my choice after my campus visit.”

Ultimately, of the 25 Catholic homeschooled students in this study, 15 students enrolled in Benedictine College, two students enrolled in Catholic University of America,

two students enrolled in the University of Nebraska, and one student enrolled in each of the following universities: Franciscan University of Steubenville, University of Dallas, University of St. Thomas, DeSales University, University of Wisconsin, and California State University.

Reflection on the College Choice Process

At the end of the interviews, participants were asked if there was anything they would do differently; the same. Six students responded that they wouldn't have done anything different; the process went as they had planned. These students expressed satisfaction with how their experience developed. However, the majority of participants, 19 students, expressed thoughts of doing things differently after reflecting on their college choice process. In particular, eight students indicated that they would have applied to more schools, five students would have started the whole process a lot earlier, three students would have reduced their stress levels, and three students offered individual responses.

While most participants seemed happy with the college that they had ultimately chosen, students spoke freely about what they would do differently if they had to do it over again. As Joseph said, "I think that I would have applied to more schools just to get more information. A lot of schools won't really send you all of the information until you actually apply. I'd probably apply to more schools just to see what my other options are." Another student, Peter expressed, "If I could do it again, I would probably look at more schools. Although I think that it is nice to have the hand of God in choosing which school you are going to go to. But, with most students, God isn't going to necessarily intercede in making them go to the perfect school for them. I would say if I could do it

again, I would look at more schools, ask more questions and visit more schools.”

Starting earlier was the advice Lucy stressed. She stated, “The first thing that I would have done is started taking the standardized test when I was in the eighth grade. In the homeschool community it is not like it is at a public high school where as soon as your sophomore year you take the standardized test. I didn’t actually take my ACT until the end of my senior year. So if I didn’t get the score that I wanted, I had a very small window of opportunity to take the test again to try to get a better score to get into my schools.”

Some participants said that starting earlier was necessary because many times they had to learn the system as they went along. No one was around to advise them and tell them what steps to take in the college choice process. For instance, Andrew felt like he had run out of time. He explained, “I would definitely start earlier. I would start towards the end of the sophomore year or the beginning of the junior year of high school. I could prepare for college and be able to apply for more scholarships because you would have more time to write essays and do the process. Like six months during your senior year, you are trying to complete high school and you are trying to do your college search. You just run out of time.”

Laura was one of the participants who stated they had made the whole process too stressful. She revealed, “I probably would not have stressed quite so much. I think there are good things about all colleges, so wherever I went, I probably would have been happy and found good things to do. At the same time, it got stressful. I was thinking that this is a really monumental decision – like between good and bad. I think there are definitely pros and cons about all colleges.”

Finally, individual participants said they should have been more proactive, should have applied for more scholarships, and should not have been as limiting in their options of colleges.

Advice for Colleges and Other Homeschooled Students

Many participants offered advice for increased communication between colleges and homeschooled students and their families and the need to provide more information to homeschooled students. These students suggested clearer websites that address the questions and needs of homeschooled families, websites with drop-down boxes or tabs to inform homeschooled families of information that is needed, and checklists to assist in navigating the college choice process.

Nine participants indicated that good communications with college admissions counselors is a key factor to attracting homeschooled families to an institution. The students expressed the importance of admissions counselors having a good working knowledge of issues surrounding homeschooling. Participants also pointed out the benefit of colleges that had clear policies for homeschooled families to follow and adhere to. As Andrew described, “For colleges, I think they should have policies for homeschooled students that are clear and that address the issues homeschoolers face. I would link that to having a counselor who knows how homeschooling works.”

Additionally, several participants suggested that colleges be more proactive in working with homeschooled students. As Rose stated, “I know a lot of colleges come to large Catholic high schools and get information out there. But there are large homeschooled groups of 300 students. Maybe try to find a way to get into something like that. Give a presentation. Get into the homeschooled co-ops and realize how much of

the population is shifting towards homeschooling.” Participants indicated that they thought college admissions departments should send out more literature, make sure that the school visit is a good experience, and be more informed of the needs of homeschooled students.

While most colleges have made it easier for homeschoolers to get information about their institutions, some participants indicated that the process would have been easier if they would have used a homeschool curriculum. Jacob advised other homeschooled students to utilize an accredited curriculum that provides a high school transcript. He commented, “It’s easier to use a homeschool curriculum in high school than creating your individual curriculum and transcript when applying to colleges – using a program, such as Mother of Divine Grace. To apply to the University of Nebraska – Omaha, I had to go and compile all sorts of records and examples of the courses I took in high school. A homeschool curriculum program, since it is accredited, is helpful in compiling a transcript and such.” Other participants expressed simply a desire to be prepared, ask others for advice, relax, and most importantly, “Just go for it.”

Summary

In this chapter, the words and stories of participants paint a picture of how Catholic homeschooled students go through the college choice process. The first section provided a description of the participants, including background information regarding their personal attributes, families, and homeschooling experience. Although participants had their own unique stories to tell, collectively, there were no major differences between Catholic homeschooled students who applied to and enrolled in Benedictine College and

those who applied to the college, but enrolled elsewhere. Therefore, data from the two groupings were combined in the findings.

The next section used Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three stage model of predisposition, search, and choice to help organize the responses relating to the research questions. Themes were generated from the interviews to explore issues regarding the influences that were most important in the homeschooled students' college choice process. Themes emerged regarding influential persons, roles parents played in the process, resources used for the search process, and the deciding influences affecting participants' choice of college.

The final section provided reflections from participants while going through the college choice process. Participants offered insightful information regarding limitations they experienced during the process. Additionally, participants provided advice to colleges to assist other homeschooled students as well as advice for other homeschooled students navigating the college choice process.

To summarize the results, the Catholic homeschooled students in this study all aspired to attend college and had parents who valued a college education. Participants had a support network that included family, friends/peers, and friends of the family in their church and homeschool community with whom they discussed their college plans. Parents played an important role for all participants in the study, however, knowledge of college planning and involvement in the college choice process varied among students.

In this study, the participants' family values were evident throughout college choice process. Other influences included family, friends/peers, Catholic faith, academic interests, finances, and specific institutional characteristics (e.g., campus climate,

location, size). In addition, participants relied on external sources, such as the Internet, printed materials, word-of-mouth, and other resources to gather information to conduct their college search.

Lastly, the primary deciding influences affecting participants' choice of college included cost of attendance, academic program, campus climate, location, divine intervention, and parental influence. This study revealed a unique faith perspective that was influential in the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students. Further analyses and discussion of the results are included in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to understand how Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process. Data were collected by obtaining background information through a demographic questionnaire and interviewing 25 Catholic homeschooled students who applied to Benedictine College for the 2010 fall semester. This chapter provides a discussion of the findings, including a review of the research questions and connections to previous literature. The information in this chapter is presented in the following sections: discussions of the findings, major conclusions, limitations of the study, implications of the study, recommendations for further research, and conclusion.

Discussion of the Findings

Findings from this study provide insight into how Catholic homeschooled students go through the college choice process. As the data were reviewed and analyzed, themes emerged that both confirmed earlier research findings and provided new information. For the purpose of this discussion section, I have organized the findings to include a brief overview of the college choice process, findings as they relate to each of the research questions, and social and cultural capital influences on college choice.

Overview of the College Choice Process

In an effort to understand and explain the college choice process for Catholic homeschooled students, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model was used to frame this study. This three-stage model, predisposition, search, and choice, is the most widely cited and provides a relevant framework in which to analyze the college choice process (Hossler, 1984; Hossler & Gallagher 1987; Hossler et al., 1999).

Consistent with Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model, almost all participants became predisposed to college between the seventh and tenth grades. In particular, 15 of the 25 participants started thinking about college during their freshman and sophomore years of high school and determined that college was in their future. After taking standardized tests (i.e., PSAT, ACT, and SAT), experiencing older siblings going to college, and/or discussing college with their parents, the students began developing their postsecondary plans. While the benefits of college attendance are far reaching, the majority of participants perceived that college was a means of financial advancement and career development. Beyond financial gains, participants believed college would lead to personal growth and intellectual development.

During the second stage, search, the participants followed Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model and began seeking information about specific colleges and universities with attributes and values that they considered important. The timing of their search process (i.e., sophomore through senior year of high school) corresponded to the timeframe identified by Hossler et al. (1999). However, several students expressed a sense of starting too late with their college search. They suggested that starting earlier would have been helpful because many times they had to learn the system as they went along.

During the final stage of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model, choice, participants made their final college choice. Many participants evaluated the colleges and universities that remained in their choice set as they considered the pros and cons of each college. Students narrowed down their choice set by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the different colleges with their family and friends, considering academic

reputation and program offerings, meeting with parents about cost of attendance and affordability issues, experiencing campus visits, and communicating with admissions counselors. These actions are consistent with previous research that found this evaluation process to be a very interactive process between the student, his or her parents, and institutions (Hossler et al., 1989).

Specific Findings Related to the Research Questions

The research questions were established to find out whether there are trends among homeschooled students in their college decision-making. Because there is a gap in the literature regarding this population of students, the questions were designed purposefully to look at how these students navigate the college choice process.

Most Important Influences in the College Choice Process

A major finding related to the first question, “What influences are most important in the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students?” is that participants in this study valued the opportunity to attend a “good” Catholic college that was affordable and offered a quality academic program in a field they planned to pursue. Eighteen of the 25 participants indicated the combination of these three factors as related to their search and choice. However, this combination of factors is not consistent with other current research, which asserts that all groups of students take the two issues of academic and financial concerns to be the two most important factors in their college decision-making process (Avery & Hoxby, 2003; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Canale & Dunlap, 1996; Choy & Carroll, 1998; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler & Litten, 1993; NCES, 2005; NPEC, 2007). The importance of Catholic identity or religious affiliation on the college choice process of homeschooled students in this study is a significant finding. Nearly all

participants expressed the desire to attend a “good Catholic college” that provided them with opportunities to continue growing in their faith life. This non-academic or non-financial factor was not considered as universally important with other populations of students represented in the broader research literature. The finding is important for Catholic colleges, such as Benedictine College, in recruiting Catholic homeschooled students. It emphasizes that these students are influenced by the Catholic identity or religious affiliation of a college or university.

Participants perceived other influences on college choice as well. Consistent with the literature (Avery and Hoxby, 2004; Chapman, 1981; Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Hearn, 1991; Litten 1991; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Stage & Hossler, 1988; Hoyt and Brown, 2003), homeschooled students in this study also identified the factors of location and size as important factors influencing their college choice process. Though these influences varied in importance from student to student, they were considered important factors among participants.

Persons Involved in the College Decision-Making

Persons involved in the college decision-making, which was the basis of the second research question, include, foremost, the participants’ parents. In this study, all participants indicated that their parents expected them to go to college. Specifically, 22 of the 25 participants said that their parents were very supportive and encouraging of their postsecondary plans. This finding is consistent with the majority of college choice literature that points to parents as the single most influential factor in determining a student's postsecondary school plans and chances of attending college (Hossler et al.,

1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Jackson, 1978, 1982; Litten, 1982; Manski & Wise, 1983; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000).

Participants described various levels of parental involvement. Some parents were actively involved and functioned like guidance counselors, taking the time to study different colleges and explore on their own. These parents also provided advice on different colleges, assisted with financial aid, and visited campuses with the participants. Some parents were not as involved, but provided helpful advice and assistance when needed. A few parents expected the participants to go to college, but were silent during the entire process and left the decision up to the students to attend, search, and choose a college.

The parental approach of gently guiding students and helping them maintain independence was very common. The majority of participants spoke of conducting their college search independently, but having the assistance of their parents when needed. Admittedly, this finding of participants conducting their college search independently was the most surprising to me as the researcher in this study. Before conducting the interviews, I assumed that the parental influence and involvement in the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students would be greater than traditionally-schooled students. I based this assumption on the nature of homeschooling (greater interaction by parents educating students at home) and my conversations with Catholic homeschooled students' parents while serving as an administrator at Benedictine College.

Additionally, participants stated that older siblings and friends/peers played a part in their college choice process. The homeschooled students in this study talked about questioning older siblings and friends who had graduated from high school about their

college experiences. Some participants spoke about friends who pressured them into considering different colleges, but in the end, they did not seem to influence the participants' final choice of college. This finding is contrary to previous research (Chapman, 1981; Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, 1997), which indicates that peers play an important role in a young person's college selection process. This finding makes sense because homeschooled students don't have peers in the same sense as traditionally-schooled students. Although most of the homeschooled students in this study were active in homeschool groups or coops and had peers within their parish or community, these peers included students of various ages. Whereas students in a traditional school setting interact on a daily basis with their peers of the same age during their educational experience.

Interestingly, friends of the family (i.e., homeschooling families, parishioners, priests, and others) played an equally important role of friends/peers in the college choice process of homeschooled students in this study. Participants described numerous incidents of seeking advice and information from these acquaintances and how they were valued as resources and as a means of gathering information. The influence of Catholic homeschooled students' friends/peers and friends of the family is a unique finding in this study. Most of the homeschooled students in this study seemed to have ample opportunities for socialization with friends/peers and friends of the family. However, the relative homogeneity of these interactions—often based around church activities and interactions with other local homeschooling families is somewhat different than the interactions of traditionally-schooled students, which are often based around various activities in the public or private school environment.

Roles that Parents Played in the College Choice Process

The third research question related to what role Catholic homeschooled students' parents play in their college choice process. Findings in this study reveal that parents played a critical role in the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students. Students mentioned most frequently the roles of encouragement and support, source of information, financial assistance, guidance, and independence. This finding supports previous college choice literature where there is general agreement that parents play an important role in student decision-making (Chapman, 1981; Hossler et al., 1989; Paulsen, 1990). Essentially, the homeschooled students in this study navigated the college choice process rather independently while including the importance of their Catholic faith and family values. Although all students articulated that they made the choice to attend college, conducted a search, and decided on their college of choice, the influence of their parents and established family values were apparent throughout the process.

During the interviews with participants, however, it became clear that not all of the homeschooled students in this study were provided the same opportunities. Although all participants were academically prepared (i.e., average GPA of 3.88 and an average ACT/SAT score of 27/1971), differences in parental education and parental income existed, which influenced their college search process. In general, participants' parents who had college degrees and advanced degrees were familiar with the college search process and were able to provide greater support and guidance based on personal accounts of their own collegiate experiences. They provided greater support in the form of information about college requirements than parents without college degrees.

Similarly, participants' parents with higher incomes appeared to have resources

available to pay for their children's college education. These parents appeared to have made financial plans to pay for their children's college education and were knowledgeable about specific colleges, academic programs, and financial aid opportunities. These findings were more evident during the search and choice stages of the college choice process, which is consistent with previous studies (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Stage and Hossler, 1989). However, it is important to recognize that eight participants did not indicate household income, making it difficult to validate these findings.

Resources Used During the College Search Process

The resources that participants used during the search process, which was the substance of the fourth question, included technology, printed materials, and personal interactions. As Hawkins & Clinedinst (2006) suggested, all participants used the Internet (i.e., search engines and college websites) to inform and guide their searches. Additionally, participants gained information about colleges through printed materials (e.g., *Newman Guide for Choosing Catholic Colleges*, *National Catholic Register*, college brochures) and advice from others.

Yet, this study's findings differed somewhat to the research findings of Hossler et al. (1998), who found that during the search process students relied more often on school-based resources for guidance and information (i.e., high school counselors, teachers, peers, college information). Participants utilized friends/peers and college information, but they did not have access to high school counselors or teachers as external resources. Many participants indicated the need for more information and guidance during their college search process. Several students expressed a lack of knowledge regarding

scholarship opportunities, transcript requirements, and in general, the steps to take during the college choice process.

Without the availability of high school counselors or teachers, homeschooled students in this study discussed the college search process with individuals who they trusted and believed could provide insight regarding individual institutions of higher education (i.e., parents, older siblings, friends/peers, friends of the family, and admissions counselors). As I transcribed the interviews, I realized the significance of personal interactions and communication with homeschooled students cannot be underestimated. As much as the students talked about making decisions on their own, the decision of college choice was strongly influenced by family, friends, and significant others.

Deciding Influences Affecting Choice of College

The final research question dealt with the deciding influences affecting Catholic homeschooled students' choice of college. All homeschooled students in this study narrowed down the colleges in their choice set by considering the factors that were of greatest importance to them. The deciding influences that students most often expressed as affecting their college choice were the cost of attendance, campus climate, academic programs, location, parental influence, and divine intervention. Interestingly, many participants expressed that they prayed about their choice of college. With the exception of divine intervention, these findings support previous studies that indicate the influences of parental factors, student characteristics, and institutional factors (Chapman, 1981; Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Hearn, 1991; Litten 1991; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Litten 1991; Stage & Hossler, 1988).

Notably, divine intervention was a significant finding that emerged when homeschooled students in this study were making their final college choice decision. This study builds on previous studies by expanding the influences on college choice to include this notion of divine intervention, which seems to be absent in previous college choice literature. In particular, over one-third of participants said that God's will was a deciding influence affecting their choice of college. These students spoke openly about their final decision being made by God and being "called" to attend a particular college. Possible explanations for why the students reported they relied on divine intervention to guide their final college choice may include having an active prayer life and a deep appreciation for one's faith.

In essence, Catholic identity or religious affiliation played a substantial role in the participants' college choice process. Unlike studies by Guido (2001) and Zerby (2002) who found that few students were influenced by the Catholic identity or religious affiliation of an institution, Catholic homeschooled students in this study consistently expressed the influence of Catholic identity and their desire to attend a "good" Catholic college. Although a more recent study by Garrett (2004) found the Catholic identity of an institution to be a secondary factor influencing the college selection process, in this study, 21 of the 25 participants ultimately enrolled in a Catholic college or university known for its Catholic identity. These findings reveal that there are some significant differences in the ways that participants made their final college choice.

In addition, it is important to point out how the cost of attendance and financial aid offers played a substantial role in the participants' college choice process. Manski and Wise (1983) suggest that whereas federal financial aid focuses on accessibility of all

students to college attendance, institutional aid focuses on attracting more highly academically qualified students to a particular college or university. In this study, participants were highly academically qualified students. For nearly half of the participants, the influence of finances (i.e., receiving financial aid and/or a merit-based scholarship) was a determining factor in their college choice. These participants were forced to carefully think about and make choices due to their own financial constraints and circumstances. This consideration of finances is similar to previous research reporting that the cost of the institution and the amount and type of financial aid a student receives impacts the ability of an individual to enroll at their top-choice institution (Callendar & Jackson, 2008; Hossler, 2000; Kim, 2004; Kurlaender, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Reay et al., 2001).

Furthermore, the importance of institutional communication and institutional fit (i.e., campus climate, location, academic programs) emerged as influential in the participants' college choice process. Homeschooled students in this study expressed a sense of personal connection with particular institutions that was most significant in influencing their choice decision. Students described various experiences of personal connections with different campuses through such things as campus tours, campus visits, and individual communication with admissions counselors. As important as institutional characteristics were in the participants' choice decision, many students identified an individual moment that emerged as the turning point for college choice. For those participants who expressed it, the institutional fit came when they felt connected through a campus academic program or a communication with college staff that they felt resonated with their own beliefs and motivations. This finding is consistent with

McDonough's (1991) study, which found that most students applied to colleges that most closely matched the academic and social atmosphere of the high school they attended.

For participants in this study, the high school they attended was their home environment.

Social and Cultural Capital Influence on the College Choice Process

As stated in Chapter Four, the homeschooled students in this study are White/Caucasian, Catholic, academically high achieving, traditional age students who come from two-parent, middle to higher income families. Over one half of their parents have at least a Bachelor's degree from college with many parents having a Master's degree or PhD/Professional degree. Cultural experiences, such the education and activities provided at home and within their homeschool community (e.g., homeschool groups and coops) differed from those who are traditionally-schooled.

Although current literature has not been conducted regarding the role of cultural and social capital of homeschool families, the very nature of homeschooling brings into question how social and cultural capital influence the process of education outside of traditional public and private schools. In this study, the manner in which Catholic homeschooled students navigated the college choice process reflected McDonough's (1997) research. Participants expressed a common set of beliefs and structures which shaped their expectations, attitudes, and aspirations. For instance, all participants aspired to attend college and had parents who valued a college education. Their aspirations were influenced by looking at the people who surrounded them, and observing what is considered good or appropriate across a variety of dimensions.

Additionally, students utilize their cultural and social capital to determine whether a specific college or college in general, feels right (McDonough, 1997). The

homeschooled students in this study were no exception. After visiting various campuses and narrowing down their choice sets, students looked at the campus climate, “the right fit”, from a community, faith, and scholarship aspect. They expressed the desire of being able to practice their faith and have opportunities to grow spiritually within comfortable, familiar surroundings. These practices are much the same as what they have experienced in their pre-college home life. All homeschooled students in this study applied to at least two colleges or universities that were perceived by them to be “good” Catholic colleges, suggesting they had been immersed through the first 18 years of their lives in a conservative Catholic worldview that survived relatively intact through their college search process.

Thus, participants had a sufficient amount of cultural capital to have a good idea of what type of college they wanted to attend (e.g., “good” Catholic college, four-year institution, liberal arts college, etc.) with most students having the financial means to attend their college of choice. However, these students had somewhat limited searches and did not consider several possibilities. Participants with less cultural capital (e.g., less household income and parental education) were more limited by finances and chose colleges that were close to where they lived. The role of cultural capital comes into play as evident in the participants’ final college choice. Ultimately, all but three participants enrolled in a perceived, “good” Catholic college.

The fact that Catholic homeschooled students in this study tended to retain the values instilled in them by their parents and other authoritative figures as they navigated the college choice process is a significant finding. For the majority of participants, their middle class, Catholic upbringing in a family that valued education, combined with their

knowledge of the importance of higher education, particularly “good” Catholic colleges provided them with the cultural capital to make an informed college choice. As the researcher, this finding was interesting and encouraging for those working in Catholic higher education institutions. Students described their desire to not only receive a college degree, but retain their family values and have the opportunity to practice them to continue growing in their faith life while in college.

Additionally, participants’ parents, friends, church, and family culture, which inform their social and cultural capital, influenced their college choice process. The people and environment with which students interact expose them to social and cultural capital. As indicated, the social world of homeschooled students in this study was largely dominated by their home school environment, which included parents, siblings, friends/peers, friends of the family, and others. The messages support, and guidance received from these various entities about college and their college decision-making process dictated students’ college choice behaviors. For instance, homeschooled students in this study considered mostly colleges and universities that were familiar to members of their family and community. For many participants this limited their choice of institutions to Catholic colleges or nearby public universities. Interestingly, however, when I asked them if they would do anything differently, the majority of students expressed they would have applied to more colleges and would have started their college search earlier.

Some participants found the college choice process difficult to navigate. As previously stated, participants turned to the advice of their family, friends, and others in their church and homeschool community for information about particular colleges. In

many cases these individuals lacked the type of cultural capital helpful to college applicants (e.g., financial aid information, application procedures, etc.). For these participants the college choice was an emotional and stressful experience. Students described stressful situations such as problems with transcripts, jumping through hoops, trying to figure out the application process on their own, and searching for transfer credits everywhere online. They believed that their college choice was a major, life-changing decision; one that would affect the rest of their lives.

Logically, it appears very likely that cultural and social capital has some impact on the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students. For instance, in this study, participants had a sufficient amount to cultural and social capital, which deemed a fit with the “good” Catholic colleges these students selected. Given the growing popularity of homeschooling in the United States, it is imperative that this relationship be examined further in future research.

Major Conclusions

Six major conclusions can be drawn from this study. These are:

1. Homeschooled students in this study navigated the college choice process rather independently while preserving their Catholic faith and family values.
2. The college choice patterns and timing of decisions of homeschooled students in this study were more similar to, than different from, previous studies on the college choice of traditionally schooled students. Influential factors that were important to Catholic homeschooled students, but relatively absent from the literature were those of Catholic identity and divine intervention.

3. Friends/peers did not play as important of a role in the college choice process of homeschooled students in this study as previous studies of traditionally-schooled students. Friends of the family played an equally important role as friends/peers for homeschooled students in this study.
4. Homeschooled students in this study often lacked the information, guidance, and support to navigate easily through the college choice process, particularly in the areas of scholarship opportunities and transcript requirements. The students received little in the way of information and support from external sources (e.g., lack of high school guidance counselors, visits from college recruiters, etc.) during the college choice process.
5. Homeschooled students in this study emphasized the importance and need for effective communication from colleges and universities during their college choice process (e.g., website information, policies, admission counselor interactions, etc.)
6. The choice of colleges of the homeschooled students in this study were influenced and structured by the social and cultural contexts in which they interacted (e.g., family values, friends, homeschooling environment, etc.).

Additional Limitations of the Study

The initial limitations to this study were identified in Chapter Three. As a consequence of the research, additional limitations emerged during the data analysis. Following are the additional limitations identified through the analysis.

The physical parameters of this study were restricted to Catholic homeschooled students who applied to a small Catholic college located in the Midwest with a strong

Catholic identity. This limitation may have affected the findings of the study, given that Benedictine College is listed in the *Newman Guide for Catholic Colleges*. Findings revealed that many homeschooled students in this study utilized this publication during their search process. A study with a broader geographical base, different institutional types, with less emphasis on Catholic identity may yield differing perspectives.

Gender was another limitation of this study. Overall, the study included 16 females and nine males. All but two participants who applied to Benedictine College, but enrolled elsewhere were female; other males were invited to participate but did not respond. Future research may choose to focus solely on either homeschooled males or females and in doing so, may reveal another dimension of the homeschooling phenomenon. In this study I did not find many connections between gender (i.e., relatively no major differences during the predisposition, search, and choice stages). However, there were some minor differences revealed while analyzing the deciding influences on college choice. For example, female participants mentioned the cost of attendance more often as a deciding influence while male participants mentioned academic programs more often.

An unexpected limitation of this study was that many participants did not know or were not willing to report their household income. Therefore, it was difficult to interpret information and form conclusions about possible relationships between a family's financial situation and the homeschooled students' college choice process. Although research has continually shown a strong correlation between family income and college attendance (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Hossler & Litten, 1993), the lack of

accurate information concerning family income limited the generalizability of the research in this regard.

Another limitation of this study was its homogeneity: all participants were Caucasian and Catholic. African-American and Hispanic students have been identified by researchers as a growing population of homeschoolers (Planty et al., 2009). Future researchers should further the body of homeschooling literature by investigating the experiences of African-American and Hispanic homeschoolers. By including homeschooled students from different racial backgrounds one might provide additional insight on background characteristics affecting college choice. Likewise, it would be useful to explore the world of homeschoolers who are secular in their teaching and curricular choices; non-Catholics. Including a broader range of homeschooled students would present a fuller picture of the college choice process of homeschooled students, one in which religious practices and observances are not dominant reasons for the students' rationale.

Implications of the Study

The findings from this study have practical implications for those interested in recruiting and assisting Catholic homeschooled students during their college choice process. As the number of homeschooled students matriculating to college grows, there is a need to understand how this new market segment makes their college choice. Following are recommendations for Catholic homeschooled students and institutions of higher education, including Benedictine College.

Recommendations for Catholic Homeschooled Students

This study makes clear the importance of information, support, and guidance in college decision-making. Many homeschooled students in this study expressed the desire for more information regarding colleges, scholarships, application and transcript requirements, and the general steps to take during the college choice process. It is highly recommended that guidance services be offered to Catholic homeschooled students. In particular, guidance counselors at area high schools, homeschool distance education programs, or existing community agencies (e.g., County Extension Offices, Centers for Leadership Development) should offer guidance counseling to these students to provide direct service to them.

Being more intentional in forging connections with existing entities that already provide guidance services to students would extend the role of college guidance to Catholic homeschooled students. Building partnerships with existing organizations may be a viable way for students to receive better and more college guidance. Guidance services should be introduced to them before their senior year in high school, ideally at the start of their freshman year.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial for college planning to be built into the homeschool curriculum for all students. Homeschool curriculum providers (e.g., Mother of Divine Grace, Seton Home Study, Kolbe Academy) should provide guidance counseling and ensure that opportunities are created for homeschooled students and parents to interact and receive relevant college information regularly. Extending opportunities for parental involvement can serve as a means to better educate parents on how to guide their students during the college choice process.

The value of this study to Catholic homeschooled students should be the research itself. Students can use the words and stories of the 25 participants as a starting point to distinguish which factors are most important to them. This research is also beneficial to other Catholic homeschooled students because it gives them information and advice regarding the college choice process to help them organize the various criteria for making a college decision.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

Colleges and universities should be prepared to increase the number of homeschooled students as this unique population of students continues to increase across the country. In order to do this, institutions must focus on outreach as well as recruitment. The responsibility for college guidance should be extended to include college admissions counselors or other staff members. Catholic homeschooled students, as well as all students, need to be educated on how to be prepared for college and be eligible for admission into higher education institutions.

In this study, participants identified various factors including the cost of attendance, campus climate, and academic programs as deciding influences on college choice. Admissions counselors should be prepared to address any concerns that may arise in these areas when conversing with students. Since most Catholic homeschooled students do not have access to a high school counselor, they may lack some basic understanding that many other college-bound students hold. Admissions counselors should be aware of this possibility and be proactive in assisting them as they navigate the college choice process. For instance, admissions staff could collaborate with homeschool education providers and co-op organizations to create a college preparation series that

may include offering exposure to various types of institutions, details on admissions and transcript requirements, financial aid and scholarship information, connections between majors and potential careers, and presentations by homeschooled graduates who attend various colleges to serve as role models for students.

Colleges and universities should also focus on offering effective forms of media for Catholic homeschooled students to obtain information about colleges and the college choice process. Participants in this study described regular use of the Internet and printed materials. These students would have been better informed if information on college websites were more accessible with clearly stated policies and college publications were made available with information about admission requirements, costs, academic majors and other pertinent information about the campuses they considered.

Additionally, increased communication between colleges and homeschooled students was one of the frequent answers given by participants to the question, “What advice do you have for colleges to assist other homeschooled students with the college choice process?” Several homeschooled students in this study indicated that good communication with college admissions counselors was a key factor in attracting them to a particular college. These students expressed the importance of admissions counselors having a good working knowledge of issues surrounding homeschooling. Efforts to further increase better communication might be for staff members to consider open houses or special visit days aimed specifically at this market segment. These events communicate that the institution hosting the event thinks homeschooled students are special. The open house and visit days are also good opportunities to explain to the

students and their parents the application process, clarify college policies, and answer any questions they have regarding the institution.

To create a more homeschool-friendly environment, colleges and universities need be sure that their admissions staffs are aware of the unique nature of homeschoolers' backgrounds. They should be educated on how to evaluate the educational experience of homeschooled applicants with training provided to admissions counselors so they know what questions to ask and what to look for when discussing college opportunities with this population of students.

Finally, homeschooling is a loosely connected, grassroots movement. It is important for admissions counselors to make contacts within the various homeschool networks, such as meeting leaders from various state home educator associations, exhibiting at their statewide conventions, and joining a listserv sponsored by various home education networks. Through these and other relationships, admissions counselors can provide better communication by answering specific college-related questions and demonstrating that they genuinely care about and understand homeschoolers and their unique needs.

Recommendations for Benedictine College

As a small Catholic liberal arts college, Benedictine College should assess its current practices and implement many of the recommendations listed above to recruit and assist additional homeschooled students. The college should ensure that it is providing pertinent information through its website and printed materials, offer admissions and financial aid guidance, interacting with statewide homeschool organizations and curriculum providers, and communicate regularly with potential homeschooled students.

Additionally, considering the meaningful role that Catholic identity played in the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students in this study, Benedictine College should continue to emphasize various practices of promoting Catholic identity within its marketing and admissions offices.

Recommendations for Further Research

As this study was a qualitative study involving only 25 Catholic homeschooled students, one could conduct another research study that would involve a larger quantitative study. A great number of Catholic homeschooled students enrolled in higher education institutions across the country could be surveyed to obtain additional information regarding college choice. Expanding the scope of the project by recruiting more participants may afford other researchers to establish patterns of behavior or perception beyond the limited scope of this study. Coupling quantitative research with previously conducted qualitative research would give a richer and fuller exploration of the college choice process of Catholic homeschooled students.

Future research should be undertaken on the homeschool population. This research revealed the importance of specific internal and external factors (e.g., divine intervention, Catholic identity, etc.) that influenced Catholic homeschooled students' college choice process. Researchers could further explore these factors on college choice with different populations. Conducting research that includes other factors would allow researchers to increase the predictive utility of choice of college models.

Additionally, future research could be conducted to further explore the Catholic homeschooled students who were studied in this sample. Breaking down the sample based on gender, academic achievement (i.e., ACT/SAT scores), and socioeconomic

status would provide additional information on how individuals decide which college to enroll in.

It would also be beneficial to the understanding of how Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process if future research included parents to see if they perceive the college choice process differently. College administrators and admissions counselors would benefit from having an increased understanding of their institution from a parents' perspective as well.

Furthermore, this study did not involve the review of college websites, admissions brochures or conversations with admissions personnel. A future research project could incorporate these types of data to determine if recruiting and marketing strategies of colleges match what enrolled Catholic homeschooled students indicate are attracting them to a particular college.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study provides a strong beginning to future research that would illuminate issues affecting Catholic homeschooled students and college choice. As previously stated, homeschooled students have traditionally been ignored in higher education research; this is reflected in the relatively few studies on homeschooled students compared with studies on other groups, including low income, first-generation, and academically at-risk students.

The growth of homeschooling in the United States has been phenomenal with the population of this group nearly doubling in the past eight years (Cogan, 2010). This study explores a segment of this growing population, giving researchers and practitioners

a deeper understanding of how Catholic homeschooled students navigate the college choice process.

Conversations with Catholic homeschooled students regarding their college choice process reveals how they are influenced to pursue colleges, how they search for a college, and ultimately how they make their final college choice. Hearing the participants' stories broadens our understanding of the college choice process and the many challenges and achievements faced by these 25 homeschooled students who were a part of this study. These participants put a face on facts and figures that sometimes are the only picture we have of this unique population of students.

I continue to be inspired by college students pursuing their dreams. The words of one participant, Lucy, especially stick with me as I conclude this study. When asked what advice she had for colleges to assist homeschooled students in the college choice process, Lucy answered, "I would just encourage colleges and admissions counselors to accept this new population of homeschooled students, communicate with these students, and just be clear as to what they need. Tell them exactly what you are looking for and call them. Just be involved with the whole process. Talk to them and make contact with them. Establish a relationship so that the whole process will just go smoother."

Likewise, in offering advice for other homeschooled students navigating the college choice process, Marie expressed, "Every family is different – especially in homeschool families, it's so unique. Basically, I'd just tell them to stick with it and don't be too afraid. Just go for it. You're not going to lose anything by taking a chance. Even if you don't know what you are doing, you have to do something."

It is hoped that through this study I have motivated others to research their topics of interest and that this study will lead to additional studies involving homeschooled students as they enter the higher education arena.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1: Participants' Demographics

<u>BC:</u> Student	Gender	Age	Race	Religious Preference	Home State
Anne	Female	19	Caucasian	Catholic	Arkansas
Bridget	Female	19	White	Roman Catholic	Illinois
John	Male	19	White/Caucasian	Roman Catholic	Minnesota
Joseph	Male	19	Caucasian	Roman Catholic	Minnesota
Catherine	Female	19	Caucasian	Roman Catholic	South Dakota
Matthew	Male	19	Caucasian	Catholic	Missouri
Peter	Male	19	White	Catholic	Ohio
Mary	Female	18	White	Catholic	California
Elizabeth	Female	19	Caucasian	Catholic	Minnesota
Theresa	Female	18	Caucasian	Catholic	California
Paul	Male	19	White	Roman Catholic	Florida
Luke	Male	18	Asian/Irish American	Roman Catholic	Iowa
Clare	Female	18	White	Catholic	Michigan
Rose	Female	19	White	Roman Catholic	Michigan
Mark	Male	20	Caucasian	Roman Catholic	Alabama
<u>Non-BC:</u> Maura	Female	18	White	Roman Catholic	Nebraska
Andrew	Male	19	White	Roman Catholic	Vermont
Martha	Female	18	Filipino/American	Catholic	California
Lucy	Female	19	Caucasian	Catholic	Michigan
Laura	Female	20	White	Catholic	Nebraska
Sarah	Female	18	White	Roman Catholic	Nebraska
Marie	Female	18	Caucasian	Catholic	Texas
Jacob	Male	20	German	Roman Catholic	Nebraska
Monica	Female	19	Caucasian	Catholic	Wisconsin
Julia	Female	20	White	Catholic	California

APPENDIX B

Table 2: Participants' Background Information

<u>BC:</u> Student	ACT/SAT H.S. GPA	H.E. Cr.	# in Family	Parent's Education Level Mother (M)/Father (F)	Parent's Occupation Mother (M)/Father (F)	Household Income
Anne	25 3.67	6	6	MA degree (M) Some College (F)	Storage Facility Owners (M & F)	\$60,000- \$79,999
Bridget	23 2.67	0	12	H. S. Diploma (M) BA/BS Degree (F)	Homemaker (M) Procurement Mgr. (F)	Did Not Indicate
John	23 3.87	64	6	AAS Degree (M) BA/BS Degree (F)	Library Assistant (M) Engineer (F)	\$100,000- \$149,999
Joseph	27 3.85	57	13	Some College (M) H. S. Diploma(F)	Homemaker (M) Warehouse Mgr.(F)	Did Not Indicate
Catherine	26 4.00	--	6	H. S. Diploma (M) H. S. Diploma (F)	Homemaker (M) Business Owner (F)	Did Not Indicate
Matthew	30 3.93	6	5	Some College (M) Some College (F)	Adm. Assistant (M) Entrepreneur (F)	\$20,000- \$39,999
Peter	1720 3.40	0	4	BA/BS Degree (M) Ph.D./Professional (F)	Pharmacist (M) Professor (F)	\$100,000- \$149,999
Mary	25 4.00	0	8	MA Degree (M) Some College (F)	Social Worker-(M) Safety Specialist (F)	\$60,000- \$79,999
Elizabeth	30 4.00	12	5	AAS Degree (M) AAS Degree (F)	Child Care (M) Technician (F)	\$60,000- \$79,999
Theresa	2090 3.98	9	13	BA/BS Degree (M) Ph.D./Professional (F)	Homemaker (M) VP of Develop. (F)	\$20,000- \$39,999
Paul	1990 3.50	8	5	Some Grad. School (M) BA/BS Degree (F)	Teacher (M) Salesman (F)	\$100,000- \$149,999
Luke	30 3.77	0	8	Some College (M) MA Degree (F)	Homemaker (M) Claims Manager (F)	\$60,000- \$79,999
Clare	27 4.00	1	8	AAS Degree (M) BA/BS Degree (F)	Dental Assistant (M) Mining Engineer (F)	Did Not Indicate
Rose	27 3.95	3	5	MA Degree (M) BA/BS Degree (F)	Read. Specialist (M) Engineer (F)	\$100,000- \$149,999
Mark	22 --	0	8	BA/BS Degree (M) MA Degree (F)	Homemaker (M) Lt. Col./Air Force (F)	Did Not Indicate

<u>Non-BC:</u>						
Maura	32 3.90	15	9	MA Degree (M) Some Grad. School (F)	Homemaker (M) Engineer (F)	\$50,000- \$59,999
Andrew	2120 3.90	35	8	BA/BS Degree (M) MA Degree (F)	Homemaker (M) Engineer (F)	\$100,000- \$149,999
Martha	2030 4.00	--	5	BA/BS Degree (M) BA/BS Degree (F)	CPA (M) Accountant (F)	\$50,000- \$59,999
Lucy	26 3.80	0	8	BA/BS Degree (M) AAS Degree (F)	Homemaker (M) Truck Salesman (F)	\$60,000- \$79,999
Laura	31 3.98	0	5	BA/BS Degree (M) Some Grad. School (F)	Homemaker (M) Geologist (F)	\$80,000- \$99,999
Sarah	28 3.95	41	6	Some College (M) Some College (F)	Homemaker (M) Construction (F)	\$20,000- \$39,999
Marie	1720 4.00	3	8	H. S. Diploma (M) BA/BS Degree (F)	Homemaker (M) Engineer (F)	Did Not Indicate
Jacob	32 3.96	0	6	BA/BS Degree (M) MA Degree (F)	Homemaker (M) Airline Pilot (F)	150,000 +
Monica	32 4.00	11	7	Ph.D./Professional (M) BA/BS Degree (F)	Homemaker (M) Engineer (F)	Did Not Indicate
Julia	1940 3.98	00	6	MA Degree (M) Ph.D./Professional (F)	Psychologist (M) Medical Doctor	Did Not Indicate

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

UNDERSTANDING THE COLLEGE CHOICE PROCESS OF HOMESCHOOLED STUDENTS

The Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

The purpose of this study is to understand the college choice process of homeschooled students.

You will be asked to participate in a personal interview that will not exceed one hour. The interview session will be tape recorded on an audiocassette. The researcher will be the only one using the cassette and it will be stored in a locked cabinet. Data and transcription of the interviews will be made available to you to check for accuracy.

No risks or benefits are anticipated with participation in this study.

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will use a study number or a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless required by law or you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Linda Henry, 3515 Neosho Road, Cummings, Kansas 66016

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researcher will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email mdenning@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

Researchers Contact Information:

Linda Henry
Principal Investigator
3515 Neosho Road
Cummings, KS 66016
913-367-2050 (h)
913-426-5676 (c)

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Faculty Supervisor
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies Dept.
Joseph R. Pearson Hall, Room 419
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045; 785-864-9722

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Project: Understanding the college choice process of homeschooled students

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

The purpose of this project is to understand how homeschooled students navigate the college choice process. Through a personal interview with you and other first-year homeschooled students, I hope to achieve this purpose.

The information you provide during this interview will be recorded and used for my dissertation. The data collected for this project will be coded and kept confidential to ensure that only I will be able to identify participants from their responses. All study participants will be assigned and referred to by pseudonyms. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

The major research question guiding this study is: How do homeschooled students navigate the college choice process? More specific research questions are the following:

1. What influences are most important in the college choice process of homeschooled students?
2. Who is involved in the college decision-making?
3. What role do homeschooled students' parents play in their college choice process?
4. What is the search process like in terms of resources used?
5. What are the deciding influences affecting homeschooled students' choice of college?

As a reminder, the consent form that you signed earlier guarantees confidentiality and ensures that you are willing to participate in the study. However, your participation is strictly voluntary and you can refuse to answer any particular question or stop at any time during the interview without consequence to you. Now we will start our interview.

Introduction

You are participating in this study because you were educated within a homeschooled family. Describe your homeschooling experience.

1. Why did your family decide to homeschool?
2. How many years were you homeschooled?
3. What type of homeschool curriculum did you use?
4. Tell me about your involvement with any homeschool groups?

Predisposition

5. When did you first start thinking about going to go to college?
6. What made you start thinking about college?
7. What influence did your parents have on your decision to go to college?

8. Why was going to college important to you?

Search

9. Tell me about when you began searching for a college.

10. What was important to you as you began your search process?

11. What was the search process like?

12. How did you gather information about colleges?

PROBE:

- What resources did you use in the search process (Internet, events, admissions counselors, peers, family members, etc.)?

13. How did you learn about the institutions that you applied to?

14. What role did your parents play in your college search process?

15. What role did your friends play in your college search process?

16. How did you decide where to apply?

17. Tell me about the college(s) you applied to?

PROBES:

- What were the things that attracted you to the college(s)?
- What were the college(s) strengths (things they did well)?
- What were the college(s) weaknesses (things you found to be difficult)?

18. Were there things that limited your search process? If so, what?

Choice

19. What influenced your final decision?

20. How did you make your final college choice?

21. What role did your parents play in your final college choice?

22. If you had to do this all over again, what would you do differently? The same?

Conclusion

23. What advice do you have for colleges to assist other homeschooled students, similar to yourself, with the college choice process?

24. If I have other questions that come up while I am working on writing up my findings, can I call you?

Thank you so much for your time and participation in this study. I will transcribe this interview and email you a copy of my transcription to confirm that I have accurately represented your viewpoint.

APPENDIX E

Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the questionnaire by checking or writing in the appropriate answers.

1. *Gender:* O Female O Male

2. *Age:* _____

3. *What is your race?* _____

4. *What is your religion?* _____

5. *Please list the members of your household/family (mother, father, siblings):*

6. *What was your SAT/ACT score?* _____

8. *What was your high school cumulative grade point average?* _____

9. *Did you receive any college credit hours during high school?* _____ If so, how many? _____

11. *What is the highest level of education of your mother?*

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Elementary school only | <input type="radio"/> Bachelor's degree |
| <input type="radio"/> Some high school | <input type="radio"/> Some graduate school |
| <input type="radio"/> High school diploma | <input type="radio"/> Master's degree |
| <input type="radio"/> Associate's degree | <input type="radio"/> Ph.D./Professional degree |
| <input type="radio"/> Some college | <input type="radio"/> Unknown |

12. *What is the highest level of education of your father?*

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Elementary school only | <input type="radio"/> Bachelor's degree |
| <input type="radio"/> Some high school | <input type="radio"/> Some graduate school |
| <input type="radio"/> High school diploma | <input type="radio"/> Master's degree |
| <input type="radio"/> Associate's degree | <input type="radio"/> Ph.D./Professional degree |
| <input type="radio"/> Some college | <input type="radio"/> Unknown |

13. *What is your mother's profession or job?*

14. *What is your father's profession or job?*

15. *What is your approximate combined yearly family income:*

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> under \$20,000 | <input type="radio"/> \$60,000-\$79,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$20,000-\$39,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$80,000-\$99,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$40,000-\$49,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$100,000-\$149,999 |
| <input type="radio"/> \$50,000-\$59,999 | <input type="radio"/> \$150,000 + |

APPENDIX F

Table 3: Participants' Homeschooling Experience

<u>BC:</u>				
Student	# of Years Home-schooled	Reasons For Homeschooling	Homeschooling Curriculum Used	Participation in Homeschool Co-op/Group
Anne	13	Individualized schooling	Created own curriculum	Yes- sometimes
Bridget	13	Friends homeschooled	Seton Home Study, then created own curriculum	Yes – several/active
John	6	Religious reasons and faith values	Different K-12 curriculums, then co-op used in high school	Yes – Church related
Joseph	13	Better education and social environment	Different curriculums/Math, HERO, PSEG, CC courses	Yes- four larger ones/one actively involved
Catherine	10	Better education and faith values	Set curriculum, then mix-in-match different curriculums	Yes – good/active one
Matthew	8.5	Traveling and disruptions	No specific curriculum	Yes – classes included
Peter	2	School atmosphere and learning disabilities	Mix-in-match different curriculums	No – associated with kids in church
Mary	13	No good schools in the area	Mother of Divine Grace	Yes – two with many families
Elizabeth	3	Sister's health condition	Seton Home Study	Yes – HEY/active
Theresa	13	No good schools in the area	Mother of Divine Grace	Yes – Catholic homeschool group
Paul	5	Better education and social environment	Created own curriculum, then co-ops used in high school	Yes- but little participation
Luke	13	No good schools in the area	Colby Academy Curriculum	No – not involved
Clare	7	Friends homeschooled	Created own curriculum, then co-ops used in high school	Yes – twice a week/large group
Rose	9	Dissatisfaction with school	Created own curriculum, then co-ops used in high school	Yes – large/active
Mark	9	ADHD and behavioral problems	Created own curriculum, but also used Saxton and Mother of Divine Grace	Yes- military and catholic groups
<u>Non-BC:</u>				
Maura	13	Strong faith values	Created own curriculum, then co-op used in high school	Yes – active
Andrew	12	Better education/faith values	Created own curriculum, then Seton Home Study used in H.S.	Yes – active in two groups
Martha		Dissatisfaction with school	Seton Home Study	Yes – but not

				very active and in name only
Lucy	13	No good school in the area	Mother of Divine Grace	Yes – active/large group
Laura	13	Dissatisfaction with school	Used different curriculums and Mother of Divine Grace	Yes – but little involvement
Sarah	9.5	Dissatisfaction with school	Used different curriculums, then Seton Home Study	Yes – active especially when younger
Marie		Religious reasons and faith values	Seton Home Study	Yes – included high school classes
Jacob	12	Dissatisfaction with school	Basic applied curriculum, then Mother of Divine Grace	Yes – large/good group
Monica	11	Dissatisfaction with school	Created own curriculum, then Mother of Divine Grace	No – not involved
Julia	10.5	Dissatisfaction with school	Mother of Divine Grace	Yes – active Catholic group