NAVIGATING SCHOOL CHOICE: DECISIONS THAT WOMEN OF

COLOR MAKE IN SEEKING CHARTER SCHOOLS FOR

THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN TEXAS

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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May 2021

Major Subject: Educational Administration

ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the reason(s) women of color were choosing charter schools for their children's education. I collected qualitative data through face-to-face interviews with women of color who currently had a child or children in charter schools in Texas. I sought to examine the decisions that women of color, specifically Latinx and African American women, make as they choose charter schools for their children's education. I use the term *women* rather than *mothers* in order to include women whose roles might be parent or guardian of school-age children in charter schools. This study was designed to (a) understand their reasons for choosing charter schools rather than public schools for their children's education, (b) add to the discussion regarding their navigation of school choices, and (c) hear their voices as they described their decision-making processes. Existing literature provides very little research on the decisions that women of color make in choosing charter schools for their children's education. Three themes emerged from analysis of the data: (a) Chooser's Agency: "I did what I thought was best for my child"; (b) Data-Informed Decisions: "I looked up the school on Google"; and (c) The Hopeful Alternative: "I knew he wasn't going back to *that* school." These themes addressed the research question: *What decisions influence the choices that women of color make with regard to choosing charter schools for their children's education?* These eight women, four African Americans and four Latinas, made their decisions based on available information and their own positionality. Regardless of whether the women were married or single, all made what they considered to be the best choice for the educational needs of their

children. Their experiences show the importance of options in the process of obtaining educational opportunities where few opportunities were available as they navigated the school choice arena in seeking a charter school for their children's education. Options matter, choice matters, and women's voices matter.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated, first of all, to God, from whom all blesses flow and on whom I lean and depend daily. Corinthians 2:9 states, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear hear, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Second, I dedicate this work to my husband, RRay Druery, Jr., who graciously, kindly, and generously knew that, if I was on the computer, there was little chance of me being disturbed for any reason, unless it was a true emergency. I also dedicate this work to my mother in law, Mary Druery; my three children, Marcus Druery, Melissa Druery-Jenkins (Jermaine), and Melanie Druery-Allen (Chris); and my grandchildren, Richis Jenkins, Christopher Allen, III, Caleb Anthony Allen, Kamryn London Phillips, Kacen Jeremiah Phillips, Christalyn Denise Allen, and Kaliyah Michelle Allen. They are the wind beneath my wings. I thank my sisters, Deborah Dove and Sylvia Bell, and my nieces, nephews, and cousins, for their undying support. We can do all things through God which strengthen us.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my Pastor, my Bishop, Minister Maurice Green, and his lovely wife, Missionary Barbara Ann Green, and the Lily of the Valley Church of God in Christ. They have prayed for me and sustained me through drought and abundance. I will be forever grateful to Elder Martin Piggee for praying for me to pass my last Stats class. Speaking of statistics, I thank Nalli Valencia, the Stats Whisperer. To my friends and my co-laborers, Dr. Altricia Larke, Dr. Vanessa Liles, Dr. Sonia Marrero, Dr. Elsa Villarreal, and to the best book club ever, the Black Pearls Literary Group: Thank you for being my friends.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No great work can be completed individually. I acknowledge those essential people who gave of their time, expertise, and knowledge to bring this degree to fruition.

The co-chairs of my committee, Dr. Gwendolyn Webb and Dr. Mario Torres, are formidable scholars in their own right. Dr. Webb is strength and social justice with a community focus and a heart willing to serve others. Dr. Torres's focus is on educational laws and governmental policies and how they intersect. When I resigned from my assistant principal position, Dr. Webb nominated me to become a Jackson Scholar and Dr. Torres provided knowledge and information regarding the University Council for Educational Administrators (UCEA). These two were the catalysts that provided the opportunities for me to become involved at the state and national levels in the educational arena.

Dr. Beverly J. Irby provided not only a Graduate Assistantship position, which paid my tuition and provided a modest stipend; she hired me full time because, in her words, "I know you can do it." Dr. Irby also ensured that I presented at conferences such as the American Education Research Association and UCEA and made available a plethora of travel opportunities within the United States and in other countries, such as Belize and Japan. She provided my first opportunity to be lead author on a research paper, as well as opportunities to author and to present student work. I am forever grateful.

Dr. Patricia Larke, who is my friend's mother, does not suffer fools gladly. She is the epitome of grace, class, and elegance. I knew that I had to finish because of her

attention to accountability for the task at hand. If we said that we were going to do

something, she held us to that standard. I thank her for taking me on and believing in me.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUNDING SOURCES

There were no contributors and funding sources for the completion of this dissertation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Education has long been seen as the gateway to equal participation and success in society and the way to a better life (Jesse, 1785). Historically, choice for schooling in the United States has been fraught with challenges, choices for some, and subjugation for specific races and populations (Goldin & Katz, 1999; N. Jacobs, 2013a). School choice, charter schools, and educational reform are interconnected in the state and federal governments in the United States (Goldin & Katz, 1999). Recent trends indicate that urban schools are becoming more racially segregated, even though there has been an increase in parents' decisions regarding choice in public education (Chapman, 2018; Frankenburg et al., 2011; Kotok et al., 2017; Rotberg, 2014; Teng, 2018; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2016). However, some researchers suggest that segregation and inequality of education have always been at the root of school choice and continue today, with African American and Latino families paying a high price for choice in education (Bonastia, 2013; Orfield, 1995, 1996; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos (2017) echoed this statement, suggesting that students of color are not only trapped in failing schools; their substandard education limits possibilities for upward social mobility.

Charter schools are yet another choice in the educational system and have been so for more than 30 years. Charter schools are tuition-free public schools that are (purportedly) open to all students and operated independently from public schools (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools [NAPCS], 2018). Most charter schools have autonomy in choosing curriculum, dress, school hours, and school boards. The first public charter school was approved in Minnesota in 1991 (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017); the first charter school in Texas was approved in 1995 (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2018a). Nationally, charter school growth has tripled in the past 12 years, currently serving more than 3.1 million students in 7,000 charter schools in more than 200 school districts. Between school years 2000 and 2017, charter schools increased from 2% to 7% and the number of charter schools increased from 2,000 to 7,000, while student enrollment increased from 0.4 million to 3.1 million (NCES, 2020). While there are inconsistencies in the exact number of students attending charter schools, researchers and reporters are in agreement that the number of students of color attending charter schools is on the increase. For example, the NAPCS (2017) suggested that 10% or more of public school students attend charter schools, while the Civil Rights Project noted in 2010 that 2.5% of all students were in charter schools, including 70% of African American students and 50% of Latino students. The Civil Rights Project/Proyoecto Derechos Civiles (2010) determined that students are attending segregated and racially isolated minority schools. The number of students of color attending charter schools has continued to increase,

particularly in urban areas (Kotok et al., 2017; Rotberg, 2014; Teng, 2018; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2016).

The USDOE, NCES (2017) determined that charter school growth had increased from 2004 and 2015 from 4% to 7% and that the percentage of students attending charter schools had increased from 2% to 5%. In 2000-2001, only 6% of African American and Latino students attended charter schools. By the 2013-2014 school year, the proportion had increased to 18%. Yet, few researchers are asking why students of color are leaving public schools and choosing to attend charter schools. In some areas, the result is de facto rather than de jure (re)segregation of charter schools. By fall 2017, the number of students attending charter schools increased to 7% (USDOE, NCES, 2020).

According to the TEA (2016-2017) Texas Public School statistics, the Texas public school system consists of 1,203 school districts and charters serving 5.28 million students. Student demographics in Texas include 52.2% Hispanic, 28.5% White, 12.6% African American, 4.0% Asian, 2.1% two or more races, 0.4% American Indian, and 0.1% Pacific Islander, with 59.0% classified as Economically Disadvantaged and 18.5% classified as Limited English Proficient.

Statement of the Problem

The first charter school in Texas opened in 1995. The NAPCS (2018) reported that, currently, an estimated 716 charter schools serve an estimated 315,200 students. However, the TEA (2018b) report indicated that there were 1,207 charter/districts, with the majority (408) serving fewer than 500 students each. TEA (2018b) also noted increases in the numbers of students in the 2016-2017 school year, in particular African

American and Hispanic students. Enrollment in the 2016-2017 school year was 673,291 African American students and 2,802,180 Hispanic students attending charter schools. Five years ago, in 2011-2012, there were 637,934 African American students and 2,530,789 Latino students. Overall, Hinojosa (2015) reported that Texas schools served larger proportions of low-income students of color than did public schools statewide. The Texas Charter Schools Association Membership Survey of 2015-2016, in a comparison of public and private schools, showed that charter schools served 23% of all African American students versus 7% in public schools 51% Hispanic students compared to 40% in public schools, 65% disadvantaged students versus 58% in public schools, and 19% Limited English Proficiency students versus 9% in public schools.

Given the numbers of students of color in charter schools, it becomes evident that increasing numbers of parents of color are choosing charter schools for their children's education. Arguments abound regarding whether school choice is effective. Wells et al. (1999) and Wells et al. (2002) maintained that school choice is ineffective in providing education for disadvantaged students due to the inadequacies of educational reforms that address education and ignore racial segregation, poverty, unemployment, and violence.

Another issue framing school choice is the expansion of neoliberalism in charter schools, which favors a transference of control from the public sector to the private sector, resulting in free markets or free trade. Teng (2018) suggested that the growth of neoliberalism policies and behaviors in the public sector provides opportunities for parents to behave as consumers in choosing schools for their children. Hence, public and private organizations, including hedge fund managers and large foundations, have

partnered with those in K–12 education in a "corporate reform" movement (Ravitch, 2013, p. 19), thereby providing even more choices for education of children.

Milton Friedman (1955) and Chubb and Moe (1990) both advocated for market-based reforms, albeit on separate sides of the issues. As early as 1955, Friedman advocated market-based reforms of school choice for disadvantaged youth via reforming the demand side through consumer choice. Chubb and Moe (1990) advocated support for charter schools via reform of the supply side through market competition; they argued that, through competition, parents would opt out of failing schools and place competitive pressure to improve current schools in low-income neighborhoods.

Ravitch (2013) asserted that the charter school reform movement seeks to "eliminate the geographically based system of public education as we have known it for the past 150 years and replace it with a competitive market-based system of school choice. Lacking any geographic boundaries, these schools must compete for customers" (pp. 19-20).

The debate continues as West et al. (2018) in the 2017 EdNext Survey reported that public support for charter schools had fallen by 12 percentage points from 2016 to 2017. Thus, there are more students of color in charter schools, schools are competing for customers in a market-based economy, and schools are becoming more segregated, with students of color opting out of public schools and attending charter schools. Yet, given all of this information, few researchers are questioning why women of color are choosing charter schools for their children's education, rather than in traditional public schools.

Purpose of the Study

Using a qualitative approach, the primary purpose of this study was to examine the reason(s) women of color were choosing charter schools for their children's education. Interviews provided opportunities for women of color to tell their stories in their own words (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) so the researcher could gain in-depth understanding from the participants' perspectives (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The term *women* is used in this study, rather than *mothers,* in order to include women whose roles might be either parents or guardians of school-age children.

This study was designed to (a) understand the reasons women of color place their children in charter schools rather than in public schools, (b) add to the discussion regarding their navigation of school choices, and (c) hear the voices of these women as they navigate the charter school system. Despite charter schools having offered local alternatives to local traditional public schools for the past 25 years, there is scant research and discussion focused on reasons women of color are choosing charter schools for their children's education.

Significance of the Study

Charter schools now exist in 45 states and the District of Columbia. Charter schools have grown exponentially since the first opening in 1991 in Minnesota. This growth has provided viable option and competition. Although demographic data differ in various data sets, charter schools have reported that they serve more children of color (e.g., African American and Latino students; NAPCS, 2018; USDOE, NCES, 2015).

The EdNext survey by West et al. (2018) established that charter schools are located primarily in urban areas and have more African American (21%) and Latino (36%) students than are enrolled in local area district schools (African Americans at 10% and Latinos at 25%). The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO; 2015) determined that there 27% of charter school students were African American, compared to 13% in public schools, and 31% were Hispanic, compared to 29% in public schools. CREDO's (2015) most recent data also suggest that 2.2 million students currently attend charter schools. Although West et al. (2018) and CREDO (2015) featured differing statistics, both showed increases in African American and Latino students in charter schools. Ritter et al. (2010) argued in their report that charter schools are much more segregated than traditional brick-and-mortar public schools and that charter schools are more likely to open in segregated neighborhoods.

The first charter school system in Texas opened in 1995, with a pilot program of 20 open-enrollment charter schools; by 1999, there were 176 charter schools. Authorized by the Texas Legislature, open enrollment charter schools were designed for innovation, to promote local initiative, and "to capitalize on creative approaches to educating students (TEA, 2020, p. 283). By 2014-2015, this number had increased to 718 (NAPCS, 2017). In 2013, there were more than 195 active charters operating 613 schools in Texas. As of September 2020, there were 333 open enrollment charter schools; 176 were active, 171 were currently serving students, and 157 had either voluntarily closed and were no longer active or were considered default closures (TEA, 2020). Enrollment of children of color in Texas doubled over the same period, particularly African American and Latino

students. According to data from the NAPCS (2017), from 1999 to 2014 African American student enrollment in charter schools increased from 8,494 to 15,172, while Latino student enrollment in charter schools increased from 9,208 to more than 45,000. During this same period (1999 to 2014), charter school enrollment increased nationwide from 25,687 to 264,849 (NAPCS, 2017). In the most recent data for 2018-2019, there were 357,217 students in charter schools in Texas, with 61.7% Hispanic, 17.8% Black, 13.9% White, and less than 8% other races (NAPCS, 2020).Whereas some students are leaving public schools, others never enroll in the public school systems, opting instead to begin their schooling in charter schools. This research centers on why women of color are choosing charter schools for their children's education, particularly in Texas, when there is a public school on almost every corner and in most neighborhoods.

This study contributes to the field of education in three respects: (a) the historical context of charter schools as it relates to liberty, freedom to choose, and the formative ideas behind charter schools; (b) variability in the form and function across charter school outputs and academic and administrative effects compared to those in public schools, including student/parent satisfaction, educational marketplaces, and geography (zip codes); and (c) current politics of charter schools. The greatest significance of this study may reside in its potential to influence the practitioner, teacher, school leader, and other major stakeholders to hear what women of color are offering as their reasons (and rights) to choose charter schools. This information may assist in recognizing other potential issues; public schools must consider making changes to welcome and encourage students of color to return to public schools and staunch the flow of students

leaving public schools. It is anticipated that information regarding the voices of women of color will be analyzed beyond the scope of this study by listening to the voices of women of color as they speak their own truth. Educators and policymakers alike should consider the value of charter school experiences in order to understand the reason(s) women of color are choosing charter schools, especially in instances where public schools are viable options.

Researcher Perspective

My role in this research is a woman of color who has assisted in choosing charter schools for my grandchildren's education carries personal significance. I am also an educator with more than 15 years of experience in public schools as a teacher and administrator. When my oldest granddaughter was 4 years old, my daughter (her mother) and I discussed educational options. I worked in the local education system and I was opposed to the testing regime and routine that had overtaken the current educational system. My experiences included working with students at a middle school as an assistant principal and, prior to that, in a high school as an English Language Arts teacher. Some students, depending on where they went to school in the city, could not write a simple sentence. My granddaughter was zoned to one such school that focused on standardized testing and struggled to educate students.

My husband and I initially undertook the financial obligation of educating her at a local private school. We sent her to what we thought was one of the best schools in the city. She was the only African American child in the class. She faltered in Prekindergarten 1 (PreK 1) but soared with a teacher in PreK 2. While in PK1, she was

"sent home" (but not suspended, in their words) for misbehavior that we found questionable and considered as reasonable behavior for a 4-year-old. (Later, when she moved to PreK 2, her brother entered the same school and had the same issues with the same teacher and teacher's aide. He was suspended at 4 years old for "trying to get his lick from a student who had hit repeatedly hit him first"). When several other teachers told us that they felt that my grandchildren were being "picked on" by the adults, we knew that a change was imminent.

After the teachers suggested that my granddaughter was not ready for their kindergarten level, we knew that we definitely needed to make a move. She was then almost 6 years old and could not read a complete sentence without struggling. We were determined that she would not spend 3 years in Kindergarten and still be unable to read. I researched schools and teachers in the area, including the local charter schools. I compared student passage rates, standardized test data, enrollment numbers, and any other available data about the school that my granddaughter was assigned to attend. We registered her in the charter school. The school placed her in first grade. She began to read within 6 weeks of the start of school, began to make straight A's, and is now happy in the second grade. Her brother has started kindergarten this year at the same charter school and is thriving. He loves school and is looking forward to attending on a daily basis.

If I, as an educator, do not know what data to research, which areas to consider, and how to locate information and compare it with that from schools in the assigned zip code, how are women of color (perhaps without the same knowledge, experience, and

educational level) choosing charter schools if they do not have access to this information or know how to use it? Is it a personal assumption of researchers that women of color do not know what to research in the area of schooling for their children? Has anyone ever asked women of color how they navigate the education system for the benefit of their children? Sadly, the answer is likely negative. Thus, I came to this work in light of the need for educational choices and better opportunities for the education of my own grandchildren and children like them.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are used in this dissertation.

African American, Black: African Americans are also referred to as Black in some data sets and research information. Black Americans are an ethnic group with total or partial ancestry from any of the Black racial groups in Africa (Rastogi et al., 2011). For purposes of this research, and to match government and state data and verbiage, the terms Black and African American will be used interchangeably when referring to African Americans.

Charter school: A tuition-free public schools with open enrollment for all students. Some charter schools use the lottery system for entrance; others may be organized and run by communities and/or corporations. Charters are formed through a legal agreement (a charter) between school leaders and an oversight authority, usually a school board or district, a university, or a nonprofit organization (Steinberg & Quinn, 2017). The charter must detail the mission of the school, programs, methods of assessment, and performance goals. Charter schools operate independently from the

regular public school system, usually with fewer regulations and perhaps financial support from or connections with businesses or foundations (McGill, 2015). Despite the freedom of flexibility and autonomy, the charter school must meet accountability standards as outlined in its charter. Charters are reviewed every 3 to 5 years by the group or jurisdiction that granted the charter; charters can be revoked if the school is not meeting guidelines on curriculum, management, and accountability (Nelson et al., 2000).

Charter school management: Charter school management organizations (CMOs) are nonprofit organizations and interests that own multiple charter school sites. Examples of CMOs are Knowledge is Power (KIPP) schools and Green Dot (Lake et al., 2010; Morris, 2017). Education management organizations (EMOs) are private for-profit interest groups and investors who own or manage multiple charter school sites. Example of EMOs are Edison and National Heritage Academies (Lake et al., 2010; Morris, 2017).

Cherry picking: The process at some charter schools of handpicking students for enrollment rather than utilizing a randomly generated lottery protocol.

Giving voice: Empowering people who have not had a chance to tell about their lives in order to bring about social change (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). "The over-arching theme of finding voice to express a collective, self-defined Black women's standpoint remains a core thought in Black feminist thought" (Collins, 2000, p. 9).

Latina/o, Latinx, Hispanic: Terms describing a person who was born in or lives in South America, Central America, or Mexico, or a person in the United States whose family is originally from South America, Central America, or Mexico. Latinx is a gender-neutral term for Latin Americans (Merriam-Webster, 2017). "Hispanic origin can

be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or person's parents before their arrival in the United States" (Rastogi et al., 2011, p. 1).

Lottery system: A system of random selection of students for enrollment in charter schools based on admission numbers and available seats for each school year.

Market-based system: Free market principles of supply and demand in the public service sector whereby supply and demand for goods and services are controlled naturally, instead of by the government; may also rely on investors to determine how the corporation is to be managed (Fabricant & Fine, 2012).

Market neutrality: The condition of the market based on supply and demand in which all consumers have inherent and uninhibited opportunities to participate in marketplace transactions; consumer choice determines the continued existence of the provided service or product. The investor seeks to profit from both increasing and decreasing prices in one or more markets while decreasing risk (N. Jacobs, 2013a). At issue is the neoliberalism (i.e., competition) in charter schools that transfers control of economic factors from the public sector to the private sector, including privatizing businesses operated by the state (Metcalf, 2017).

School choice reform/theory movement: A theory conceived by Milton Friedman (1955) to introduce privatized public education as an innovative, competitive alternative to traditional public schools through vouchers and charter schools (Stein, 2015).

Traditional public school: A local neighborhood school governed by a local governing board or a highly centralized bureaucracy and bound by contractual

agreements and attendance boundaries (N. Jacobs, 2013a). Brick-and-mortar public schools are typically located in neighborhoods from which they draw their attendance.

Women and children of color: African American or Black women, Hispanic women, and other women who are self-defined as non-Caucasian. Thus, women of color do not include White, Caucasian, or women of any other race or nationality. In this study, women of color (and their children) may also be referred to as Black and Brown in reference to skin color and tone.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study was grounded in the tenets of critical race theory (CRT; Bell, 1992) and rational choice theory (RCT) and framed by naturalist inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic study is research conducted in the field in which the researcher avoids manipulating research outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The narrative inquiry technique was used to capture the voices of the women through interviews to convey their stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010) to illuminate a specific issue or situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Critical Race Theory

CRT emerged from work by legal activists and scholars such as Derrick Bell, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Kimberlé Crenshaw. CRT begins with the premise that racism is normal in the United States (D. Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2010). Milner (2007) suggested that CRT calls for a critical analysis of race in America. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Ladson-Billings (2010) contended that CRT should be assimilated into the educational system. Researchers (e.g., Crenshaw et al., 1995;

Gooden, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2013) have advanced the work of CRT in education and reform by suggesting that colorblind approaches, data-driven leadership, prepackaged and scripted standardized testing have not worked for students of color CRT "has become a centered conceptual framework to understand American education and reform" (Khalifa et al., 2013, p. 489). Thus, CRT provides a legal and historical framework to explain and analyze how policies and institutional practices reinforce inequities (D. Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2010).

Although CRT has its foundation in the legal theory of the 1970s, which provided legitimacy and understanding to the political movements of feminism, sexism, and school integration (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), its purpose is to "guide action geared toward racial equality" (McDougal, 2014, p. 61). Several tenets are associated with CRT, of which the main three are as follows:

(1) racism is an endearing and integral part of American life;

(2) Whites accept and support equality in the form of laws and policies as long as they do not diminish the power and privilege to which they are accustomed (this is known as the interest convergence theory); and

(3) the historical context of racism influences present social conditions and outcomes influences. (McDougal, 2014, p. 61)

CRT asserts that individuals should have the opportunity to tell their own stories, counterstories, and counternarratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010). D. Bell (1992) argued that race should be situated within its social and historical contexts, including social structures and institutions, such as the educational system,

(Johnson & Bryan, 2017); however, there has been a lack of research on CRT in P–20 educational arenas (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The goal of this researcher was to go beyond the rhetoric, standardized testing issues and changes, and educational policies to hear from women of color in their own voices regarding how they make decisions in education for children in their care.

Rational Choice Theory

Adam Smith (1776) was credited as the father of RCT, with the idea of the invisible hand that influences free-market economies, specifically in microeconomics and rational actions and individual behavior. RCT has its origins in economics and makes the basic assumptions that people will always make predictive, rational, logical decisions based on calculating the costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do (Scott, 2000). The three premises of RCT are that (a) human beings base their behavior on rational choice calculations, (b) human beings act on rationality when making choices, and (c) choices are aimed at optimizing pleasure or profit (Business Dictionary, 2018; England, 1989). Economists J. Levin and Milgrom (2004) defined RCT as a process by which people determine what choices are available and then choose the one most preferred from the available options. RCT posits that people behave as they do because they believe that performing their chosen actions will result in more benefits than costs (Scott, 2000). That is, people make rational choices based on their goals and those choices govern their behavior.

Sociologists have challenged the findings and assumptions of economists in RCT. Sociologists have proposed that RCT makes three assumptions: (a) people choose

on the basis of the best information that they have available; (b) choice is not monolithic; and (c) decisions must consider culture, values, and identity (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) argued that what a person will do in a given situation cannot always be known because emotions make it difficult to predict individual actions. Scarcity of resources and social constraints "serve to provide sanctions of both a positive and negative kind that raise or lower the net benefit of any contemplated course of action" (D. Friedman & Hechter, 1988, p. 202).

Of interest here is that sociologists also argue among themselves that people are making the best decisions they can but differ on how this occurs, debating whether people are generally forward looking (Petersen, 1994), backward looking (Macy, 1993), or sideways looking (Heckathorn, 1996). Petersen (1994) maintained that forward-looking people maximize their decisions with the best information of what the future holds; however, this suggests that the process is too cognitively demanding for most people. Macy (1993) reasoned that people are backward looking and make decisions based on past actions. Heckathorn (1996) argued that people are sideways looking, copying cultural decisions made by neighbors and friends. Few researchers are asking women of color how and why they are choosing charter schools and in which direction they are looking to maximize their decisions. Further, few researchers are providing opportunities for women of color with children in charter schools to tell their stories in their own words and from their own perspectives.

Research Question

This study was guided by the research question, *What factors influence the decisions that women of color make with regard to choosing charter schools for their children's education?*

Limitations, Considerations, and Assumptions

Limitations

The study has the following limitations:

1. The study was limited by the number of women of color who chose to participate.

2. The participants were drawn from a single state (Texas); results and viewpoints may not be generalizable to all women of color in the state or in other states.

3. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to schools in all school districts.

Considerations

The considerations in this study were determined by a desire to understand why women of color are choosing charter schools for their children's education. In order to gain the perspectives of the women of color, participants were recruited only from women of color who had children enrolled in charter schools in Texas during the 2016-2018 school years. The data did not allow collection of views from women of color whose children were enrolled in private and public schools in the state.

Assumptions

This study proceeded on the following assumptions: (a) The selected women of color would respond to questions and interviews accurately, (b) the selected women of color would understand the vocabulary and concepts associated with the choices and decision making in the navigation of school choice, and (c) the collected data would accurately reflect the participants' information.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation reporting the study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, the researcher's perspective, definition of terms, theoretical frameworks, research question, and limitations, delimitations, and assumptions of the study.

Chapter II is comprised of a review of the literature addressing the following areas: (a) the historical context of charter schools (e.g., liberty, freedom to choose, formative ideas behind charter schools), (b) variability in form and function across charter schools, including charter outputs and effects of charter schools (i.e., comparison to private schools, student/parent satisfaction), and (c) the politics of charter schools (e.g., educational marketplaces and zip codes).

Chapter III covers the methodology used in this research study. It addresses selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection plan, and data analysis plan. Chapter IV introduces the participants, including their demographics, and the demographics of Reliance Charter Academy (RCA).

Chapter V presents the themes from the interviews, the results of data analyses, and relevance to the research question. Chapter VI includes a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications of the findings for theory and practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusions (Azodi, 2006; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter includes a review of literature related to charter schools. Almost 30 ago, charter schools as they are known today did not exist. Charter schools have been considered another educational opportunity in the United States for a more than a quarter of a century; thus, they are no longer a phenomenon or a pariah of the education system in the United States. Opponents and proponents have taken positions on both sides of the issue. Proponents suggest that charter schools can be innovative, provide specialized curricula or specific training, and provide women of color a choice of schools to educate their children while also providing a free education (Greene, 2011; McGill, 2015). Opponents suggest that charter schools drain existing public schools of necessary funding (Alexander, 2015), impoverish public schools to support privatized schools (M. K. Schneider, 2016), and present a danger to the fundamental ideas of democracy in public schools (Ravitch, 2013). Charter school and choice research focuses on parents as decision makers but rarely focuses on women of color as primary decision makers for their children's education.

Public funding for charter schools is now more than $30 billion dollars annually, including local, state, and federal expenditures (National Education Association, 2016). An exploration of the history of charter schools, including charter school management structures and charter school demographics is followed by followed by (a) the historical context of charter schools (i.e., formative ideas behind charter schools, educational

reforms and educational policy); (b) variability in form and function across charter schools, including current charter school information and effects of charter schools (i.e., current locations, demographics, locations in Texas); and (c) the politics of charter schools (e.g., educational marketplaces, zip code geography, and (re)segregation of neighborhoods amid school choice).

The Historical Context of Charter Schools

To understand the charter school movement requires understanding the historical context and policies that have occurred over time. Two men are credited for setting in motion chartered schools for the future, albeit in outcomes that neither anticipated when they first encouraged the idea. The first is Albert Shanker; the second is Ray Budde. Albert Shanker is considered a founding father of the charter school movement. Shanker served as president of the American Federation of Teachers from 1974 to 1997. Ravitch (2013) reported that in 1988 Shanker was trying to determine what to do with disengaged students and those who dropped out of school. Shanker's (1988) initial idea was to form a group of six to eight teachers within a school who would work collaborate on a plan for these types of students. Teachers would gain permission from the school and from the union to put this plan in place but the plan would not include competition with the school. The school would be free from burdensome regulations that typically govern a school and teachers would be free to come up with their own ideas for educating disengaged and dropout students in the community. Under Shanker's plan, traditional public schools would be set up like charter schools, whereby the schools would be subject to market forces based on the clientele.

Shanker borrowed the term *charter school* from Ray Budde. Budde introduced the term at a national convention in 1974, entitled Education by Charter, in which he discussed reorganizing the educational system via a school-within-a-school model to assist disengaged students (Budde, 1988, 1996; Kolderie, 2005). Budde's plan was that a school would have a charter for a specific time, work with students who were disengaged, and at some point the work would be completed.

According to Ravitch (2013), Budde was very enthusiastic about his plan until 1993, when he saw what was happening in Baltimore.

> There, a private-for-profit firm called Education Alternatives Inc was given a contract to run nine struggling schools. These were not charter schools; they were privately managed schools operating under a contract to the district and subject to the rules of the district. . . . Scores did not go up . . . . [The schools] fired unionized paraprofessionals, who earned $10 with benefits. (Ravitch, 2013, p. 157)

Shanker and Budde renounced their support for charter schools, suggesting that the schools were frauds, with their own agendas to close public schools (Ravitch, 2013; Russakoff, 2015; Shanker, 1996; Strauss, 2017). Educational reforms continued to inform policies, and vice versa.

Educational Reforms Inform Educational Policies

Prior to the first charter law, there were discussions concerning reforming the current educational system at the state and national levels. Chubb and Moe (1990) suggested in *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* that an educational reform

movement was needed based on (a) the poor quality of public education, (b) the lack of educational competence on an international scale for U.S. public school students, and (c) failure of the systems and institutions that govern public education. They contended that, due to the bureaucratic, hierarchical nature of public schools, the plethora of interest groups and labor unions, public schools could not possibly educate every student.

Within the significant backdrop of discussions of educational reform, Minnesota wrote the first charter school law in 1991 and opened the first charter school in 1992 (J. Schneider, 2017). California followed in 1992 and other states quickly placed charter school laws on the books and promptly opened their doors. However, the charter school laws did not fulfill Shanker's vision for chartered schools. Montaño (2015) suggested that Shanker wanted teacher autonomy to make changes within the schools; instead, charter school operators created structural changes, including exemptions from state education codes, public school regulations, and pre-existing collective bargaining agreements with teacher unions that eventually served to deregulate public education. Further, Montaño (2015) maintained that continued publicity against teacher unions, a promise of classroom autonomy, and a demand for increased accountability via test scores increased charter school proliferation.

During the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan urged states to take the lead in educational reform. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) criticized U.S. public schools. President Reagan and the Commission contended that American schools were inadequate and failed to produce a competitive workforce (Klein, 2011; Sinquefield, 2013). *A Nation at*

Risk was the catalyst for reform efforts at the local, state, and federal levels, calling on public, private, and parochial schools to give the best education possible to disadvantaged and gifted students so that they could attain high school education to become productive citizens and have the skills required for careers.

Although charter schools are not mentioned in the document, there is a belief that *A Nation at Risk* provided the impetus and encouragement for charter school operations, along with a new wave of educational reform calling for higher standards and competition in education (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2011). "The pursuit of excellence and efficiency replaced equality as the leading goal of American schooling again" (Matheson & McKnight, 1999, para. 1). Koller and Welsch's (2017) discussion of Race to the Top (RTTT) contended that more choices could benefit students and provide more options for children and women of color who utilized charter schools and "foster competition that would incentivize public schools into improving their own programs in order to retain students" (p. 158).

Between 1991 and 1997, 25 states passed charter school legislation (Matheson & McKnight, 1999). In November 1997, the House passed H.R. 2616, the Community-Designed Charter School Act of 1997, to increase funding for the Federal Charter School program and to increase support for charter schools in states that met priorities (e.g., provide financial autonomy, allow for increases in the number of charter schools, and periodically review the performance of charter schools; Riddle et al., 1998). During the same year, the Senate introduced S. 1380, the Charter School Expansion Act of 1997.

No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Every Student Succeeds Act

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB dramatically expanded testing and required reporting of student scores by race and income level, in addition to assigning U.S. schools passing or failing ratings based on achievement levels of students on their rosters. Another change dominated philanthropy in education.

> Beginning in 2000, there was a rapid change of the guard as living billionaires— Bill Gates of Microsoft, the Walton family of the Walmart fortune, Michael Dell of Dell Computers, and Eli Broad, the California insurance and real estate magnate—became the nation's top donors to K-12 education. (Russakoff, 2015, p. 8)

In 2010, President Barack Obama's RTTT federally funded grant provided funds to states that raised the cap on charter schools for the first phase of funding; however, the award was disappointing when only two states (Delaware and Tennessee) receiving funding (Dillon, 2010). The program required that 100% of a state's districts commit to building better teacher evaluations, tracking student achievement, intervening in failing schools, and eliminating caps on charter school expansion (Dillon, 2010). Texas, along with Alaska, North Dakota, and Vermont, did not apply for the RTTT grants.

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law during President Obama's second term. ESSA reauthorized NCLB and provided provisions for states to have more control over school accountability. Under ESSA, states could have parent input and could set their own goals for student achievement, a provision not found

in NCLB. States were to consider more than test scores to evaluate schools. Under

ESSA, states utilized five factors. Four factors addressed academic evaluation: (a)

reading and mathematics test scores, (b) English language proficiency, (c) high school

graduation rates, and (d) an academic measure chosen by the state for grade schools and

middle schools. The fifth factor, based on grade level, included kindergarten readiness,

college readiness, school climate and safety, or access to and completion of advanced

coursework (Jones, 2014).

Charter Schools: Current Information

The rapid pace of charter school legislation and state implementation has led

some to question the true goals and methods of charter schools, particularly with

increases in racially segregated and linguistically isolated learning environments

(Camera, 2017; de Souza, 2017; Frankenberg et al., 2011), rational choices of education

(Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Morris, 2017; Patillo, 2015), and the economics of school

choice and choice of locations of schools (Bruner et al., 2012; Gant, 2006; N. Jacobs,

2013b). In essence, the question arose: Who is making the choice—students or schools?

Regardless of the methods utilized in school choice, enrollment in charter schools has

shown dramatic increases over time.

Charter schools are increasing in number. The NAPCS and the NCES differ on

the numbers of students attending charter schools and the number of charter schools.

According to the NAPCS (2020), there were approximately 3.3 million students in an

estimated 7,500 charter schools in 2015, with a growing waitlist at 65% of the schools.

According to USDOE, NCES (2020), charter schools serve 3.1 million students in 7,000

schools. From school years 2001 to 2017, the percentage of all public schools operating as charter schools increased from 2% to 7% percent (USDOE, NCES, 2016). Charter school student enrollment increased during the same time period from 0.9 million students to 2.7 million students, while the number of students attending public schools decreased by 0.4 million (USDOE, NCES, 2018). Conversely, from 2000 to 2017, traditional public school enrollment increased by 1.3 million between 200 and 2005 and then decreased by 0.7 million between 2000 and 2017 (USDOE, NCES, 2020).

Charter schools provide an alternative to the public and private schools. Goldhaber and Eide (2003) suggested that having a choice in education and competition in and of itself may be necessary to improve education for students who actively choose charter schools, as well as those who do not. However, it is difficult to measure this potential improvement and the research findings have remained inconclusive.

The charter school debates continued on the national stage after the appointment of Michigan resident and pro-voucher supporter Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education by President Trump on November 23, 2016. The Senate needed 51 votes to confirm DeVos's appointment. On February 16, 2017, with the vote tied at 50-50, Vice President Michael Pence cast the historic deciding vote for his party's nominee (LoBianco et al., 2017). With DeVos's appointment, proponents and opponents alike are scrutinizing the future of charter schools. Trujillo (2014) suggested that "the popularity of charters in communities of color points to longstanding inequities in public education along racial lines—not a desire for a corporate vision of reform" (p. 5). Further, President Trump's first budget proposal was to include an increase of nearly $400 million for the federal

Charter Schools Program, along with a package of other choice-friendly programs (Brown et al., 2017).

Current Locations of Charter Schools

Charter schools currently exist in 45 states and the District of Columbia (NAPCS, 2011). Charter schools are publicly funded and governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract (or charter), usually with the state, district, or other entity (USDOE, NCES, 2017). As of school year 2014-2015, the only states without charter school legislation were Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia (USDOE, NCES, 2017). Kentucky passed charter school legislation in 2019 (USDOE, NCES, 2020). As of the 2015-2016 school year Washington and Mississippi had nine and two charter schools, respectively. California has the highest number of students in charter schools—approximately 627,000, or about 10% of all public school students. The District of Columbia has the highest percentage of students (45%) enrolled in charter schools laws (USDOE, NCES, 2020). Twenty-six of the 45 states that have established charter school legislation have assigned multiple authorizing bodies.

Charter schools have some autonomy and flexibility with regard to rules and regulations, which differ from those for public schools. For example, some charters operate as their own Local Education Agencies (LEAs), rather than as part of traditional public school district LEAs (NAPCS, 2011). These authorizing bodies, not the local school district in which they choose to locate, approve charter schools. "This means the entry decision in most of these states will not be determined or constrained by the

resident school district" (Koller & Welsch, 2017, p. 159). Charter school attendance is publicly funded and charter schools exchange their increased flexibility for increased accountability (Andreyeva & Patrick, 2017).

The majority of charter schools receive additional flexibility in relation to the mandates of public schools' bureaucracy, including teacher salaries, freedom from collective bargaining and union agreements, determining school attire, selective admissions standards, hiring teachers in some areas without requisite certifications, and experimenting with curriculum and the prescribed school calendar. Charter schools are prohibited from charging admission and from discrimination based on gender, race, national origin, or disability, and they must also comply with general health and safety laws (Andreyeva & Patrick, 2017; Stein, 2015; Steinberg & Quinn, 2017).

Existing public schools can apply to convert to charter schools and parents, teachers, nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher education can apply for or sponsor charter schools. The NAPCS (2014) reported that 67% of all charter schools were independently run, nonprofit, single-site schools, 20% were run by nonprofit organizations that ran more than one charter school, and just less than 13% were run by for-profit companies. For-profit charter schools must meet financial oversight regulations, just like any company with which the government would contract to provide a service. Some networks are quite large. Achievement First operates 32 schools in Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island. The Noble Network of charter schools in Chicago operates 16 high schools and serves more than 11,000 students, more than most

school districts in Illinois. After Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans essentially replaced the traditional public school system with charter schools (Khadaroo, 2010).

Charter Schools Currently in Texas

Charter schools in Texas differ from charter schools in other states, such as Louisiana and Washington, where almost all of the traditional public schools have been replaced by charter schools (Khadaroo, 2010; M. Schneider & DeVeaux, 2010). In most cities in Texas, the traditional public school brick-and-mortar buildings are still in existence in almost every city and neighborhood. There is currently a multiplicity of choices in most cities in Texas for public education. For example, in one 44.4-square-mile city in Texas with a population of 84,637 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017) and serving 16,000 students, there are 14 elementary schools, two intermediate schools, two middle schools, and four high schools, along with 13 private and religion-focused schools. The city is also home to three charter schools, serving 496 students of all races and ethnicities. This is a far cry from the more than 70% of students attending charter schools in Louisiana (Khadaroo, 2010) and the more than 40% of students attending charter schools in Washington (M. Schneider & DeVeaux, 2010).

Charter rules vary by states. In Texas, a charter may be revised, revoked, or terminated if the state board of education finds that the school has violated the terms of the charter, if the school is financially mismanaged, or if it otherwise violates any applicable law (Texas Education Code §12.103-104). The charter school law was enacted in Texas in 1995; by 1999, there were 176 charter schools in Texas. By the 2014-2015 school year, the number of charter schools had increased to 718 (NAPCS,

2017). In 2020, there were 834 charter schools, with 357,217 students (NAPCS, 2020).

Texas is now second only to California in the number of charter school students,

335,006 to 606,519 respectively, with an ethnic distribution of 26.5% African

Americans, 31.1% Latinos, and 34.1% Whites (NAPCS, 2017). The next section details

the increases in enrollment of students of color over the years and details how

enrollment continues to increase among students of color, doubling and tripling over the

same time period.

Charter Schools: Current Demographics

Charter school enrollment increased from 350,000 in the 1999-2000 school year

to more than three million students by 2020 (Center for Education Reform, 2018; U.S.

DOE, NCES, 2020). According to the most recent report for demographics in charter

schools (USDOE, NCES, 2020), between 2000 and 2017, enrollment of White students

decreased from 43%, enrollment of Black students decreased from 33% to 26%, and

enrollment of Hispanic students increased from 19% to 33%. By contrast, between fall

2000 and fall 2015, the percentage of Hispanic students increased from 19% to 32%

while White students decreased from 43% to 33%. Black student enrollment decreased

from 33% to 27% during the same enrollment period (USDOE, NCES, 2018). Thus,

there was a drop in enrollment of White and Black students over the same period of

time, 2000 to 2017 (USDOE, NCES, 2020). Over all, Charter schools tend to enroll a

larger proportion of African American and Latino students than do traditional public

schools nationwide (CREDO, 2013). The trend of enrollment and growth continues. For

example, in a 10 -year period (school years 2003-2004 to 2013-2014), the percentage of

charter school students who identified as Hispanic increased from 21% to 30% while enrollment for students identified as White decreased from 42% to 35%, and enrollment for Black students was steady at 27% (USDOE, NCES, 2015). However, sources disagree on the ethnic percentages of enrollment in charter schools and public schools over the years. Barrows et al. (2017) listed African American students at 21% and Latino students at 36%, while the public school system's enrollment listed African American students at 10% and Latinos at 25%. CREDO (2015) reported 27% African American students in charter schools, compared to 13% in public schools, and 31% Latino students in charter schools, compared to 29% in public schools (Table 1).

Table 1

Differences in Ethnic Enrollment Percentages by Organization

Ethnicity	U.S. Department of Education (2015)	EdNext (2016)	EdNext Public Schools (2016)	CREDO (2017)	CREDO Public Schools (2017)
African American	27%	21%	10%	27%	13%
Latino	30%	36%	25%	31%	29%

Note. CREDO = Center for Research on Education Outcomes.

In fall 2015, more than 75% of students attending charter schools were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (USDOE, NCES, 2018), which seems to suggest parents with lower incomes are choosing charter schools at higher rates than parents with

higher incomes. CREDO (2013) compared charter school and public school populations in 27 states and found that charter schools served a slightly higher population of low-income students than traditional public schools, but the proportions were the same as with the traditional public schools from which local charter schools drew their students.

Since the focus of this study is on charter school enrollment for African American students (a term used interchangeably with *Black* to mirror the data from national organizations) and Hispanic students (a term used interchangeably with *Latino/Latinx* to reflect governmental data) enrolled in CMOs, EMOs, and independent charter schools, data from the NAPCS were restricted to the information sought for this study. (The NAPCS Charter School Data Dashboard for 2013 provides a complete listing of all races/ethnicities.) Table 2 details numbers of students by race/ethnicity, with the exception of 2013, showing a marked increase in enrollment by Black and Hispanic students since 2005. Data for race/ethnicity for 2012 and earlier are from the NCES Common Core of Data. Data from 2013 are from state departments of education.

Table 3 displays the number of all students enrolled in the 718 charter schools in Texas by race/ethnicity from 2005 to 2014, along with Other students (who may be listed as Biracial), and those enrolled in CMO, EMO, and Independent charter schools. The table shows an increase in all races/ethnicities since 2005, but specifically double-digit increases for Black students and more than quadruple increases for Hispanic students. The areas with no numbers reflect the absence of students listed under this race/ethnicity or failure of students to self-report under these headings.

Table 2

Numbers of Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2005 to 2014

Year	Total	Black	Hispanic	Other	CMO	EMO	Independent
2014	2,686,166	467,709	552,744	57,095	560,548	519,256	1,216,244
2013	2,515,982	586,108	621,666	69,331	510,034	493,408	1,143,066
2012	2,280,627	494,491	483,251	51,441	407,613	373,777	952,102
2011	2,029,263	466,296	423,797	45,299	361,098	335,870	870,200
2010	1,805,002	394,158	358,734	43,123	301,041	269,128	762,338
2009	1,627,403	355,425	298,361	21,806	240,515	251,546	689,929
2008	1,445,954	359,482	286,358	20,535	227,109	268,311	704,048
2007	1,293,560	323,931	249,517	19,146	183,626	227,141	645,679
2006	1,165,201	295,313	222,936	17,741	157,713	208,594	588,393
2005	1,019,621	264,458	178,654	13,053	117,884	175,271	502,186

Note. From *Details From the Dashboard: Estimated Number of Public Charter Schools and Students,* by National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2014, retrieved from http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/students/oage/race/year/2011. CMO = charter school management organizations, EMO = education management organizations.

According to the NAPCS (2017), from 1999 to 2014 African American student enrollment in Texas increased from 8,494 students to 15,172 students, while Latino student enrollment increased from 9,208 to well more than 45,000 students.

Charter Schools: Structures and Arrangements

Financial arrangements by charter schools have been an issue of debate and finger pointing for some time, making it difficult to differentiate between nonprofit and for-profit charter schools. According to the charter school blog from the Center for

Table 3

Numbers of Students by Race/Ethnicity Enrolled in Charter Schools in Texas, 2005 to 2014

Year	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pac. Isl.	Native	Other	CMO	EMO	Inde-pendent
2014	12,938	15,172	45,088	2,768	143	390	1,242	41,692	10,159	23,658
2013	11,937	15,318	43,232	2,305	68	246	1,095	39,906	9,956	23,583
2012	8,958	14,823	40,088	1,741	54	236	761	37,256	5,969	23,260
2011	9,563	14,296	38,547	1,609	51	294	787	32,917	7,945	23,464
2010	8,113	13,847	34,397	1,150	44	257	652	26,518	6,161	25,235
2009	7,592	13,939	32,490	1,454			155	25,065	5,790	24,360
2008	6,692	13,108	29,092	1,061			100	21,775	5,056	23,222
2007	6,427	12,674	26,162	796			91	19,074	3,981	23,095
2006	5,457	12,714	23,744	603			82	16,997	3,439	21,843
2005	3,246	8,494	9,208	261			57	12,190	2,128	6,402

Note. From *Details From the Dashboard: Estimated Number of Public Charter Schools and Students,* by National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2014, retrieved from http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/students/oage/race/year/2011. Pac. Isl. = management organizations, EMO = education management organizations.

Popular Democracy and the Alliance to Reclaim our Schools (2015), charter fraud and abuse in 15 states exceeded $200 million. Accountability issues abound: diverting more than $14 million in school funds to personal funds (Dorothy I. Height Community Academy Public Charter School, Washington, DC), failure to report income paid for wages on taxes (Grand Traverse Academy, Michigan), and lying about the number of students in schools (30 charter schools in Ohio). The report asserts that the

accountability issues are hiding in plain sight but, because of lack of oversight, the price of these financial arrangements is becoming a litmus test of doing business in charter schools. M. K. Schneider (2016) asserted that charter schools are a way to reward investors and political cronies, while Henig (2008) suggested following the money to understand why things happen as they do and who gets funding for promotion of charter school information across the political landscape.

M. K. Schneider (2016) maintained, "So long as nonprofit charters are able to hide behind the designation of 'private corporation' in order to avoid accountability for the public funding they receive, then the term privatized suits them" (p. 96). M. K. Schneider (2016) further argued that for-profit entities profit from taxpayer money that had originally been spent on educating students in neighborhood schools while they are also free to form partnerships with businesses, "where the business owners could well be the charter school operator, the charter management operator, the charter management organization, or members of the charter boards and their families" (p. 96).

Charter schools choose their own management structure, which typically does not include the traditional elected school boards that lead brick-and-mortar public schools. Charter schools have branched from Friedman's philosophy of the neighborhood charters with the addition of CMOs and EMOs. The reproduction and success of charter schools depend on economies of scale for both CMOs and EMOs. Berliner et al. (2014) reported that charter schools may be run by a management company outside of a district school board, be part of a chain run by either nonprofit or for-profit EMOs, or be independently managed and operated.

Economies of scale enable replication of charter school models that work, ensuring collaboration among similar schools and building support structures for the schools. One example of an economy of scale was President Obama's federal grant, RTTT, which was based on its efforts to reproduce, reward, and expand high-quality charter schools.

Charter Management Organizations

CMOs are nonprofit entities that manage multiple charter schools. CMOs usually provide back-office functions for public charter schools to take advantage of economies of scale (Lake et al., 2010; Morris, 2017). Examples of CMOs are the KIPP Foundation, Uncommon Schools, and Green Dot. Charter schools such as KIPP and Green Dot are funded through public federal, state, and local dollars, and can receive supplemental funding via charitable donations from individuals and foundations. According to the NAPCS (2017), the number of schools operated by CMOs grew by 25% and the number of students in those schools grew by more than 35% from 2008 to 2009-2010, with a current enrollment of 228,273 students.

Education Management Organizations

EMOs are typically for-profit entities that manage charter schools and perform functions similar to those of CMOs. EMOs generally charge a fee for their services to charters and are typically run by investors who own or run multiple sites (Lake et al., 2010; Morris, 2017). Examples of EMOs are Edison Charter Schools, National Heritage Academies, and White Hat Management (Lake et al., 2010: Morris, 2017; NAPCS, 2018). Enrollment in EMO schools grew by 45%, enrolling more than 334,000 students

in the 2009-2010 school year (NAPCS, 2017). Berliner et al. (2014) reported that EMOs managed 30% of all charter schools nationally.

More than 95% of CMOs and EMOs are concentrated in urban areas (65.9% of CMOs in cities and 50% of EMOs in suburban areas; NAPCS, 2018). Seventy-four percent of CMOs are located in Texas, California, Arizona, and Ohio; 77% of EMOs are located in Michigan, Florida, Arizona, and Ohio (NAPCS, 2017). According to the NAPCS's most recent publication, "A New Model Law for Supporting the Growth of High-Quality Public Charter Schools" (2018), the majority of students enrolled in CMOs were Hispanic (40.2%) or Black (35.9%). Conversely, the majority of students in EMOs were White (40.0%) or Black (35.8%). Thus, Latino and African American students comprise the largest population in CMO and EMO charter schools, which leads to the question, why are women of color choosing charter schools for their children's education? Debate concerning charter schools continues in many areas related to the education of students more than 25 years after the first charter school opened.

Market-Based Education and Choice

There are proponents and opponents of the market-based system of delivery of education. Chubb and Moe (1990) argued in favor of the market-based approach to charter schools and decentralizing education, competition, and choice in public school spaces. School choice was promoted as a means to provide families in economically struggling neighborhoods the option to send their children to higher-performing schools without regard to location (M. K. Schneider, 2016; Shober, 2011). Ravitch (2010) concluded that the market is not the best way to deliver public services, particularly

when education should be distributed equally to every person, regardless of political power or ability to pay, much like police and fire protection. M. K. Schneider (2016) suggested that traditional public schools have been forced into an unfair competition with charter schools, wherein they are obliged to educate all students while charter schools choose which students to educate. Morris (2017) contended that there should be a neighborhood effect, which he defined as ensuring that "a market is functioning within parameters of the public welfare or public good" (p. 11). K. M. Lewin (2017) questioned whether privatizing educational services for the poor makes sense, especially if public investments do not prioritize equity, redress imbalances, and promote a sense of social justice. K. M. Lewin (2017) posed questions that should be answered before deciding on policy for low-price for-profit schools:

> These questions are addressed to those who have yet to understand that markets cannot deliver rights or distribute public goods equitably, that paying school fees is inappropriate for households below the poverty line, and that all modern democracies have a social contract with their citizens to promote public goods. (pp. 81-82)

Initially, charter schools were introduced as free-market public school options that operated under the terms of a charter between the state board of education and the local school district (Budde, 1996; M. K. Schneider, 2016). The free market principles of supply and demand in the public service sector are based on the assumption that supply and demand for goods and services are controlled naturally instead of by the government but also may rely on investors to determine how the corporation is to be managed

(Fabricant & Fine, 2012). N. Jacobs (2013a) discussed market neutrality based on supply and demand wherein all consumers have inherent and uninhibited opportunities to participate in marketplace transactions and consumer choice determines the continued existence of the provided service or product. The investor seeks to profit from both increasing and decreasing prices in one or more markets while decreasing risk (N. Jacobs, 2013a).

At issue is neoliberalism (i.e., competition) in charter schools that transfers control of economic factors from the public sector to the private sector, including privatizing businesses run by the state (Metcalf, 2017). Metcalf (2017) claimed that the neoliberal agenda is nothing more than "pushing deregulation on economies around the world, for forcing open national markets to trade and capital, and for demanding that governments shrink themselves via austerity or privatization" (para. 1). Neoliberalism calls for individuals to think of society as a universal or free market and thus has applied commodity markets (including competition, perfect information, and rational behavior) in order to compete in the world's economy (Metcalf, 2017).

A market rationale for providing opportunity for all with choice in schools is that parents and mothers have the opportunity to vote with their feet. However, Berliner et al. (2014) suggested that students who leave public schools are most often those who have better resources, such as academic skills, higher motivation, and more involved and better educated parents. Berliner et al. (2014) described these parents as having more connected and better social networks and better access to transportation to get to schools that are not in their neighborhoods. This arrangement results in "creaming the crop"

from public schools, leaving them with students who need the most resources (e.g.,

teachers and staff) struggling to serve "increasingly poor and underperforming students,

special education services, English language learning resources, counselors, school

psychologists, and a wide array of instructional supports" (Berliner et al., 2014, p. 43).

Conversely, Cole (2017) contended that parents should have the freedom to choose the

public or private schools that their children will attend. Essentially, in the marketplace,

women of color and other parents of school-age children have become consumers. As

charter schools continue to expand across the United States, they have come to represent

choice for some but inequity for others.

(Re)Segregation of Neighborhoods and Schools Related to Choice

Some researchers have suggested that the current charter school system

encourages racial segregation (Berliner et al., 2014; Camera, 2017; Frankenberg et al.,

2011). According to Frankenberg et al. (2011), African Americans and Latinx students

are twice as likely to attend charter schools with same-race students than students in

brick-and-mortar schools. Parents of charter school students are also more likely to be

African American and Latinx than are parents of either public school or private school

students (Barrows et al., 2017). Bifulco and Ladd (2007) revealed that Black students

who transferred to charter schools in North Carolina were transferring to schools that

were more racially isolated than the schools that they had left. S. B. Lewin (1996)

discussed the aspect of expansion of parental choice leading to racial segregation almost

20 years prior to the increase of segregation in charter schools. Such segregation and re-

segregation is being reported in states such as Louisiana, Texas, Michigan, New York, and Ohio, among others.

Buras (2017) put forth the argument that charter schools, particularly in her home city of New Orleans, had actually prohibited educational access. The racial divide was drawn even further with the city school system, which were almost 100% charter schools, and further divided into White and Black areas. There are three conceptual factors in what Buras (2017) proposed to the political ecology of market-based privatization efforts: Whiteness as property, accumulation by dispossession, and urban space economy. Buras (2017) explained that the market-based system in New Orleans is primarily run by Recovery School District which represents the interests of the White political establishment and educational entrepreneurs/reformers, not that of the families and students. School districts and buildings were quickly taken over by Recovery School District and made available to those who were willing to enter into partnerships and to invest (read Whites) in education of children in New Orleans. The takeover of public schools led to firing more than 7,000 veteran teachers, mostly teachers of color, and diversion of funds from teacher salaries and benefits to charter school operating budgets, along with hiring mostly White, noncertified, nonunionized, and inexperienced teachers (Buras, 2017).

These so-called "entrepreneurial opportunities" (Buras, 2017) resulted in the National Association of Advancement for Colored People (NAACP) calling for a moratorium on charter schools for people of color and in low-income areas (Camera, 2017; Marachi, 2016; NAACP, 2016). This decision was reached after a year-long

exploration of educational needs of students of color in cities such as New Haven, Memphis, Orlando, Los Angeles, Detroit, New Orleans, and New York. According to the NAACP's report, charter schools' promises of innovative education and infusion of creativity had not materialized (Camera, 2017). "Concerns have been raised within the African American community about the quality, accessibility and accountability of some charters, as well as their broader effects on the funding and management of school districts that serve most students of color" (Camera, 2017, para. 3). In its resolution entitled *School Privatization Threat to Public Education* (NAACP, 2016), the NAACP continued to oppose privatization of public schools and public subsidizing or funding of for-profit or charter schools, which the group had been doing since 1998 (Marachi, 2016). However, Senator Ted Cruz, in an address on Homeschool Iowa Day at the U.S. Capitol, declared that school choice is the civil rights issue of the 21st century (J. Jacobs, 2014).

Vasquez Heilig et al. (2016), in their research on charter schools in Texas, argued that not only are charter schools separate and unequal but that they there is segregation within special populations, such as English Language Learners (ELL), low-income students, and special education students. In "Separate and Unequal? The Problematic Segregation of Special Populations in Charter Schools Relative to Traditional Public Schools," Vasquez Helig et al. (2016) found that charter schools underenrolled ELL students compared to traditional public schools, especially in large metropolitan areas. State-level analyses from Vasquez Helig et al. (2016) showed only modest disparities in demographic data but local areas reflected larger disparity between the local public

schools and enrollment in charter schools studied in schools in Houston, Texas. Charter schools were serving fewer ELL students than public schools (charters enrolled 30%, compared to public schools' 45%) but not significantly fewer disadvantaged students are special education students. Vasquez Helig et al. (2016) called the significant differences "segregative" categories when the percentage served differs by 10% or more. They argued that charter schools can choose whether to be racially and economically diverse.

Charter schools now choose students, rather than students choosing the schools. Researchers have suggested that, in some cases, parents are unable to make good choices. When this claim is made, it is made with the idea that low-income and less-educated parents will base choices on irrelevant school characteristics or ancillary information Harris (Harris, 2018; Orfield, 1995). However, the opposite is often ignored; when White and/or wealthier parents select schools based on the school's racial composition, they are choosing schools based on race, not on academic achievement (Orfield, 1995).

M. Schneider and Buckley (2002) analyzed parental choice behaviors based on their interest search patterns and came to the conclusion that the unrestrained introduction of choice actually increased segregation. They surmised that choice provides less pressure for schools to improve. Parents stated that their primary reason for choosing charter schools was the hope of achieving a better education for their children in smaller classes (Kleitz et al., 2000). However, when M. Schneider and Buckley (2002) gathered data from the interest search site, parents had looked at student demographic information early in the search, and very few had visited the school

profiles concerning teacher information. Thus, the parents had not checked to determine whether teachers were highly qualified but had checked to see how many students of color were in the school. In essence, these parents were saying one thing in voice and written surveys but doing another when the search was online. Although this is not new behavior, it is disconcerting when one considers that open-market choice plans can (and do) increase segregation.

Segregated Public Facilities: Separate But Equal?

In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that racially segregated public facilities were legal so long as the facilities for African Americans and Whites were equal. The Jim Crow laws had established the "separate but equal" doctrine that would last for six decades. Lawsuits challenging segregation in the public schools were brought before the Supreme Court and, in 1951, the Court agreed to bundle five of the cases and hear the challenges. The case was named for Oliver Brown, whose daughter was barred from attending the all-White school in their Topeka, Kansas, neighborhood. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* decided in 1954, ended the "separate but equal" distinction in education and society that had existed since 1896. The justices unanimously ruled that segregation violated the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. The Fourteenth amendment, passed just after the Civil War, had guaranteed rights to all citizens regardless of color.

The landmark *Brown* ruling was met with resistance, anger, and violence, and integration was slow to appear in schools across the South (Ogletree, 2004). In May 1955, *Brown v. Board of Education II* remanded further segregation cases to the lower

federal courts and directed district courts and school boards to proceed with desegregation "with all deliberate speed." This ruling and the prolonged resistance to the ruling sparked the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s that, some say, continues even today (Rothstein, 2014). Some researchers have determined that *Brown* opened the door for other changes in America's society, including desegregating interstate transportation, restaurants, and other public facilities, however, they agree that what Brown did *not* do was to end segregation in public schools (Clotfelter, 2004a, 2004b; Ogletree, 2004; Rothstein, 2014; Sunstein, 2004).

Private Schools, Segregation, and the Southern States

In the 64 years following *Brown*, schools have engaged in various methods to counter the spirit of the ruling and keep children of color from an inclusive and equal education. These methods include an increase in White students attending private schools, particularly in the South (Clotfelter, 2004b) to closing public schools, leaving African American students completely out of the education process (M. K. Schneider, 2016). States such as North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Virginia, Texas, and Alabama have created their own antidesegregation legislation to circumvent the *Brown* rulings. Virginia's Pupil Placement Act (VPPA) was one such design to circumvent the law. VPPA allowed students to choose annually which school they would attend, so long as there was room at the school, then provided tuition reimbursement for White students who attended private segregated schools (Clotfelter, 2004b; Eskridge, 2010; Pratt, 2003). Most schools remained segregated; even now, this de facto segregation exists, with White flight and re-segregation of neighborhood schools and

communities (Orfield, 1995; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Vasquez et al., 2011). In fact, it was only after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, when the federal government threatened to deny federal funds to public schools, that schools began to make feeble attempts to follow the *Brown* ruling (Ogletree, 2004; Sunstein, 2004).

Segregation Now, Segregation Forever?

As public schools of choice, charter schools have purported to eliminate segregation and to attack the persistent achievement gap issues without limitations of segregated neighborhoods (Hinnefeld, 2016). Frankenburg et al. (2011) posited that free market concepts of supply and demand and choice by rational actors are played out in the decisions made by parents of color and by parents of White students (C. Bell, 2009). Parents, as rational actors, weigh their preferences regarding the type of school that their children will attend and thus make the selection from information that they have received and researched (C. Bell, 2009). Unfortunately, the byproduct of choice has been integration and resegregation of schools (Khalifa et al., 2013).

Strategic designs are made by charter school operators to open schools in underserved neighborhoods with high concentrations of low-income, minority, and low-performing students. Decades of low performance and widening achievement gaps for at-risk students are often the catalysts that educators cite when choosing charter schools (NAPCS, 2011). However, research in this area is somewhat mixed, with some studies suggesting that charters are more likely to locate in areas with low-income and minority students, large racial diversity, low mathematics scores, school closings, high expenditure per pupil, and high community education levels, while more recent research

has suggested that charter schools plan to locate in higher-income areas with a diverse population, a smaller percentage of students on free and reduced-cost lunch, and a higher median income (Koller & Welsch, 2017).

Frankenberg et al. (2011) explored the relationship between charter schools and segregation in 40 states to determine which charter schools were segregated, including how charter schools compared to public schools in terms of segregation. The researchers determined that charter schools were more racially isolated regardless of the location of students. In some regions, charter schools served White students almost exclusively, while in other schools students of color had very little exposure to White students. Frankenberg et al. (2011) contended that there were few ELL students in charter schools and claimed that even after two decades, the promise of charter schools to ensure equality and integration had not been realized. Rothstein (2014) suggested that the issue is education and that education policies and housing policies are inextricably linked. He determined that schools are segregated because the neighborhoods in which they are located are segregated.

Geography and Choice in Parent Decision Making

Andreyeva and Patrick (2017) suggested that charter school operations are strategic in their location of schools in Atlanta. Charter schools were located in two zones (Zone 1 and Zone 2) of a pre-zoned school area. Students living in Zone 1, which had closer proximity to the charter school, had an increased probability of admission if their households were located in that zone. There was also an increase in property values "by six to eight percent for priority one zone homes compared to priority two zone

homes after the opening of a new charter school" (Andreyeva & Patrick, 2017, p. 19).

Andreyeva and Patrick (2017) also determined that capitalization was stronger in areas

with new charter schools when the neighborhood had an underperforming traditional

public school. Students located in Zone 2 had less chance of being enrolled in the

"neighborhood" charter school, and property values were lower in Zone 2.

Geography, according to C. Bell (2009), is not just about distance and the time

required to commute to school; it also is concerned with neighborhood and community.

C. Bell's (2009) research of charter schools and parental choice in Detroit schools

suggested both a demand side and a supply side of school choice. The demand side

includes deliberately dispersed neighborhood schools and layering choices over court-

ordered segregation, which included forced busing and creation of magnet schools

designed to attract students across a city's neighborhood. The supply side of choice

brings geography to the forefront as schools deliberately locate in specific areas to attract

particular families.

In Detroit, with its surplus of school choices (98 charter, 393 private, 48 magnet,

and 341 traditional public schools), students were assigned schools based on their

neighborhood address but they could request a change of schools if space were available.

However, when charter schools opened in the city, and from 1999 to 2003,

approximately 23,000 students left the Detroit Public School system. C. Bell's (2009)

research determined that parents were more interested in obtaining education for specific

needs of their children (gifted or science interest, small classes, or care for a child with

attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder) rather than geography related to distance and

time. Thus, although geography was important to most parents who were interviewed, the location of the school became less important, particularly if the school met their specific criteria (e.g., student acceptance in the applied program, specific programs, and students' and parents' needs and wants). However, for most parents in the study, geography did not play a role if the parents had available resources, such as transportation and schedules convenient to school schedules. C. Bell's (2009) study pointed out that, with the plethora of choices available in Detroit schools, most parents were rational actors and made decisions based on what they wanted for their children.

Holme's (2002) study of location and place of school choice documented choices by upper- and middle-class parents. These parents selected neighborhoods that were known for their schools but also happened to be more White and wealthy than the neighborhoods and schools that the parents were leaving. The parents decided that these neighborhoods were places that would advantage their children. Holme determined that these parents did not systematically visit the school or investigate test scores; instead, they selected schools with fewer students of color and families with higher incomes. Therefore, these parents were not rational actors, per se, in researching schools; instead, they based their decisions on what Du Bois (1903) called the problem of the color line.

Parents of Color as Choice Makers

Darling-Hammond (2004) found that education was at the center of scholarly discussions for Black parents. Howell et al. (2011) reported that 64% of African American parents supported charter schools and 14% opposed them. Green and Meade

(2004) suggested that charter schools addressed the needs of students of color, had smaller school sizes, and exercised more flexibility in hiring teachers.

Patillo's (2015) research focused on politics of school choice in a Black working-class community of Chicago. In qualitative interviews, 77 low-income African American parents recounted the barriers that they had faced as they navigated school choice for their children. These parents suggested that they were chosen, rather than having an opportunity to choose. Patillo contended that, while parents felt that they had a clear vision of what they were looking for, they were equally clear that their access to good options in Chicago was limited by socioeconomic barriers of their own and external barriers inherent in the choice process. The parents also conveyed important experiential knowledge that it was often the schools that chose students, rather than the other way around. Moreover, choice itself was a significant burden in addition to other daily struggles.

Research by Vasquez Helig et al. (2016) into a Houston, Texas, charter system also determined that charter schools chose students and families, not the other way around. Researcher de Souza (2017) suggested that charter schools "currently act as gatekeepers, guaranteeing that the most disadvantaged students are denied the opportunity to secure a seat in a charter school" (p. 105).

Embedded within the market metaphor of school choice and charter school theory is the idea that parents and students will be able to become active consumers of an educational product and make school choices that best fit their educational and social needs (Stein, 2015). M. Schneider et al. (2000) argued that low-income parents value

education just as much, if not more than, high-income parents but do not have access to the same quality of school information. Not having crucial information increases the risk of being left behind or making poorly informed decisions.

Lacireno-Paquet et al. (2002) compared student composition in market-oriented charter schools, nonmarket charter schools, and traditional public schools in Washington, DC. They determined that, rather than "creaming" the top of the potential student population (i.e., taking the best students), the market-oriented charter schools may have been "cropping off" services to students whose language and special education needs might make them more expensive to educate. Not having access to schools also increases the risk of being left behind in the educational marketplace.

Choice and Capital Resources

Charter schools were designed to improve the public school system via competition, as well as offer parents more choice in their children's education (Andreyeva & Patrick, 2017). Some charter school charters allow for inter- and intra-district transfers for students to attend their schools, allowing parents an alternative to the traditional public schools in their attendance zones. Research has shown that parents of school-age children who have capital resources (i.e., financial resources and educational knowledge) typically purchase homes in areas where there are higher-performing school districts (Bruner et al., 2012).

Some researchers have ascertained that attendance in open-enrollment charter schools decreases the advantages of living in the best-performing school districts (Andreyeva & Patrick, 2017; Bruner et al., 2012; Harris, 2018). In essence, parents have

been willing to settle into less expensive neighborhoods if they have access to better schooling or are provided school choice (Harris, 2018), but this may lead to an increase in housing values in other neighborhoods. For example, Bruner et al. (2012) noted that, "after their states adopt inter-district choice programs, districts with desirable nearby, out-of-district schooling options experience relatively large increases in housing values, residential income, and population density" (p. 604). Thus, parents with the most resources, options, and choices can always move to districts that match their resources and educational choices.

While there is a plethora of research related to school reform efforts, choosers and nonchoosers, who owns and who profits from charter schools, the location of charter schools, and racial and economic school segregation, there is a paucity of research concerning why women of color choose charter schools for their children's education. Research is required to understand the personal reasons given by parents, in particular women of color, for choosing charter schools, especially in light of the difficulties in providing charter schools and school choice to African American and Latino students (DeLuca & Rosenblatt, 2010).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the reason(s) women of color were choosing charter schools for their children's education. The term *women* is used in this study rather than *mothers* in order to include women whose role might be parent or guardian of school-age children. The study was designed to (a) understand the reasons women of color place their children in charter schools rather than in public schools, (b) add to the discussion regarding their navigation of school choices, and (c) hear the voices of these women as they navigate the charter school educational school system. The research question was, *What influences the decisions that women of color make with regard to choosing charter schools for their children's education?* This chapter is organized into six sections: (a) research design, (b) the researcher's positionality, (c) selection of participants, (d) instrumentation, (e) data collection, and (f) data analysis.

Over the past 30 years, charter schools have shown phenomenal growth, with 6,400 charters enrolling more than three million students (USDOE, NCES, 2020). CREDO (2015) reported that urban charter systems in America serve a disproportionately low-income and minority student body and thus may not mirror the districts from which charter schools draw students. It is important for women of color to have their voices heard as they tell their stories from their own perspectives regarding why they choose charter schools for their children's education.

Women telling their own stories in their own words is important due to the increasing numbers of children of color in charter schools. However, there is a paucity of research asking those women why they are choosing charter schools for their children's education. According to the NAPCS (2018), more than 70% of parents support public school choice, and millions more would attend charter schools if they were afforded the opportunity. The NAPCS (2018) claimed that charter schools have been exceptionally beneficial, particularly for Black and Hispanic students and for those living in poverty based on increases in mathematics and reading scores.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design with an interpretive narrative approach, utilizing CRT and RCT perspectives. According to Sauro (2015) and Creswell and Creswell (2018), the narrative approach weaves events from interviews and documents in order to look for themes. These themes can then be used to provide details to assist in describing a culture, illustrate an individual's story, or reconcile conflicting stories and challenges from the individual's perspective.

Much of qualitative research is founded on interpretivist epistemology (Gall et al., 2007; Merriam, 2002). Qualitative researchers seek to understand how one interprets individuals' interactions at a particular moment in time and in a specific context (Merriam, 2002). Interpretivists assert that the aspects of social reality of an individual are constructed by those who participate in a particular environment. "Interpretivists believe that aspects of social reality have no existence apart from the meanings that individuals construct for them" (Gall et al., 2005, p. 14).

Merriam (2002) indicated that qualitative interpretive research has the following key characteristics: "(a) understanding the meaning people have constructed, (b) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, (c) the process is inductive, and (d) the product is richly descriptive" (pp. 4-5). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) noted that qualitative research enables scholars to gather and interpret information in terms of the meaning that the participants have constructed. Case studies, personal experience, interviews, observations, and historical data are some of the empirical ways in which qualitative data can be gathered to address the research questions posed by a study.

Qualitative research assumes that social reality is constructed by the participants (Gall et al., 2005) and is an attempt to understand how individuals experience their social world and the meaning that it has for them (Merriam, 2002). Gay et al. (2005) defined *qualitative research* as the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest. Mason (1996) explained that qualitative studies require the researcher to answer three broad questions: (a) What is the research or phenomenon to be investigated about and why is this worth investigating? (b) What is the strategy for linking research questions, methods, and evidence? and (c) How will the proposed research take account of ethical, political, and moral concerns?

According to Gall et al. (2005), "Qualitative research is carried out by individuals who . . . focus on the study of the different social realities that individuals in a social situation construct as they participate in it" (p. 14). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that quantitative research presumes an objective social

reality, takes an objective view toward participants and their setting, and is relatively constant (Gall et al., 2005). This is not to say that one is better or worse than the other.

Qualitative research affords the researcher the opportunity to hear the voices of the informants, in addition to studying and observing human actions and behavior in natural settings and generating both verbal and pictorial data to represent the social environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research methods include unstructured, open-ended interviews, document analysis, and participant observation to generate qualitative data (Schwandt, 2001). Gay et al. (2005) corroborated previous research and stated that qualitative inquiry often involves simultaneous collection of a variety of narrative and visual data over an extended period of time in a naturalistic setting. This type of research usually involves a small number of participants so that participants' experiences become the focus of the study. Nonnumerical data, such as extensive notes taken at a research site, interview data, or video/audio recordings, are utilized in a qualitative study. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) proposed that the purpose of qualitative research is to acquire in-depth understanding of purposively selected participants from their perspectives.

Critical Race Theory

Qualitative research provides participants opportunities to discuss their experiences, feelings, and personal observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Utilizing the CRT emphasis on narratives, counternarratives, and storytelling provides opportunities to challenge the dominant culture's voice. Zamudio et al. (2011) explained that "critical race theorists give voice to the experiences and truths of those without

power while simultaneously asking citizens to question the master narratives we have come to believe" (p. 5).

Crenshaw (1996), one of the foremost leading scholars of CRT, argued,

Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. Thus, when the practices expound identity as "woman" or "person of color" as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (p. 357)

Crenshaw (2011) reported in the article "Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking Back to Move Forward*"* that the early years of CRT "involved exceptional labor, intellectual creativity, and considerable patience" (p. 1300). Nevertheless, Crenshaw argued that race, struggle, racial gatekeepers, and debates characterized CRT's early years, much the same as today. The ideas and concepts were discussed and influenced by scholars of color "and the paradigms of thought developed by generations of thinkers who made this subjectivity the center of their scholarly production" (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1304).

The tenets of CRT work to overcome antiracist sentiments by giving voice to marginalized views held by those who have been unheard or even silenced in the telling of their own stories and perspectives (D. Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010).

Ladson-Billings (2016) suggested that it can be problematic when individuals embellish or valorize their history and culture over that of another, presenting it as one universal truth. Thus, in utilizing one of the five tenets of CRT emphasis on voice or counternarrative, the informant is to describe her story from a different vantage or viewpoint (Ladson-Billings, 2016). The informant is invited to articulate the situation in the manner that alternatives are considered. Zamudio et al. (2011) explained, "Critical race theorists give voice to the experiences and truths of those without power while simultaneously asking citizens to question the master narratives we have come to believe" (p. 5). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) proposed that CRT is about engaging and transforming the triple intersectional relationships of race, racism, and power. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) posited that the importance of gender- and class-based analysis should always include race, especially within a "raced" education, such as in the educational history of the United States.

CRT builds on two movements: critical legal studies and radical feminism. CRT "has become a centered conceptual framework to understand American education and reform" (Khalifa et al., 2013, p. 489). CRT provides a legal and historical framework to explain and analyze how policies and institutional practices reinforce inequities (D. Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2010). The theory has its foundation in the legal theory of the 1970s that provided legitimacy and understanding to the political movements of feminism, sexism, and school integration (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The purpose of CRT is to "guide action geared toward racial equality" (McDougal, 2014, p. 61). Khalifa

et al. (2013) noted that CRT "has become a centered conceptual framework to understand American education and reform" (p. 489).

Just as Ladson-Billings (2016) and Zamudio et al. (2011) posited the importance of giving voice, or providing opportunities to individuals to tell their stories, Ladson-Billings (2016) noted that telling stories and counterstories can be therapeutic and cathartic.

> A story represents an instance and does not include enough "empirical" data points or large enough sample to conform to Western science notions of "truth." Critical race theorists use storytelling as a way to illustrate and underscore broad legal principles regarding race and racial/social justice. (p. 352)

Narratives, counternarratives, and storytelling work to challenge the dominant culture voice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Thus, it is imperative that individuals, especially women of color, tell their own stories in their own ways and for researchers to hear their voices. "Stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414). Delgado (1989) maintained that story telling focuses on building communities, builds consensus, and provides "a common culture of shared understandings" (p. 2414). Zamudio et al. (2011) asserted that CRT broadens truths to include the history and experiences of people of color. Based on this literature, qualitative research techniques were used to conduct this research. This allowed the researcher to capture the experiences of women of color as they navigate their choices for the school-age children in their care.

Rational Choice Theory

RCT has its origins in economics and posits that an individual will always make predictive, rational, logical decisions based on calculating the costs and benefits of an action before deciding what to do (Scott, 2000). The three premises of RCT are that human beings (a) base their behavior on rational choice calculations, (b) act on rationality when making choices, and (c) choices are aimed at optimizing pleasure or profit when making decisions (Business Dictionary, 2018; England, 1989). J. Levin and Milgrom (2004) defined RCT as the process of determining what choices are available and then choosing the one most preferred from the available options. Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) defined RCT as a family of theories the goal of which is to "explain social outcomes by constructing models of individual action and social context" (p. 191).

RCT is the view that people behave as they do because they believe that performing their chosen actions has more benefits than costs (Scott, 2000). That is, people make rational choices based on their goals, and those choices govern their behavior. RCT makes the assumption that people choose on the basis of the best information that they have available, that the choice is not monolithic, and that the choice must include culture and identity (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). Adanali (2017) provided the example that eating is an individual act but table manners are part of a specific culture. Therefore, culture also shapes behavior. Adanali (2017) suggested that, if people followed the rules of rationality, they could make calculated decisions every time a decision is to be made. According to Adanali (2017), RCT is able to explain

the complexity and subtlety of cultural behavior [but the] the success is limited

. . . primarily due to three factors: 1) they make unrealistic assumptions about

human cognitive capacities, 2) they disregard the content of preferences, and 3)

they dismiss the role of emotions in decision making. (pp. 136-137)

Although RCT has its basis in economics (J. Levin & Milgrom, 2004), the theory

is being contested and debated by cultural researchers (Adanali, 2017), economists

(Zafirovski, 2014), and sociologists (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). Adanali (2017)

argued that choice theorists do not take into account the relationship of individuals to

each other but presuppose that decisions are made individually when, in fact, decisions

are made for the good of social groups. Therefore, human beings do not make decisions

in a vacuum; they take into consideration assumptions, choices, opportunities, other

opinions, and emotions (their own and those of others) before making decisions. Thus, a

perfectly rational decision made by one person can seem irrational to another person.

RCT in economics is based on the premise of individual self-interest utility

maximization (Zey, 2001) wherein the individual is primarily interested in making the

best, most rational, choice for himself or herself from a plethora of options. However,

Zafirovski (2014) opposed using rational choice theory in areas other than economics,

suggesting that it has experienced a breakdown and is no longer able to "encompass,

explain, and predict virtually 'everything and anything under the sun' of social action

and society . . . [or] its all-encompassing economic model and approach" (p. 433).

According to Zafirovski (2014), within economics, RCT has ruled supreme and

universal and was considered the panacea of economic approach and model of social

action and society. Zafirovski (2014) contended that RCT has mutated into sociology, muddying the waters of RCT theoretical framework to become a savior of RCT for sociologists. Zafirovski's (2014) argument is that there is a breakdown in modern economics that makes RCT unrecognizable.

Sociologists Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) contended that "genuine rational choice theories, by contrast, are concerned exclusively with social rather than individual outcomes . . . and given others' behaviors, social outcomes can be both unintended and undesirable" (p. 192).

> Hechter (1986) explained that RCT
>
> considers individual behaviour to be a function of structural constraints and the sovereign preferences of individuals. The structure first determines, to a greater or lesser extent, the constraints which people act. Within these constraints, individuals face various feasible courses of action. The course of action is selected rationally. . . . When individual preferences are assumed to be known, transitive and temporally stable, behaviour can be predicted in the face of structural constraints. (p. 268)

Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) noted that making decisions can be an agonizing and emotional, and that it is difficult to make new choices based on what has been done previously. They explained that there are "thin" and "thick" models of individual action and social outcomes. "Thin" models say nothing about the individual's motivations; "thick" models specify motivations based on predictions of the event before it occurs. Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) argued that, because psychologists, sociologists, and

economists try to predict what would happen in given situations based on what has

occurred in the past, researchers face difficulty in determining RCT. RCT is marked by

the inability to explain what a rational person will do in a given situation. Therefore,

some psychologists who study RCT have difficulty in agreeing on the psychological

processes of rational choice theories (Herfield, 2017). Hector and Kanazawa (1997)

acknowledged the difficulty in and skepticism of rational choice but claimed that this

difficulty is due to misunderstanding the theory or applying the decisions that actors

make to other theories.

At issue is the problem that, since individuals are not always informed or

calculating when making decisions, as well as facing a multitude of decisions, rational

choice theorists cannot calculate the expected consequences of options and choose the

best of them. Individuals will make decisions based on the setting (e.g., the choices

available), what is best for the group, their culture, and what will be the optimal outcome

to satisfy their goals. Adanali (2017) suggested that RCT has the potential to include

identity and culture "only if they transform their sense of rationality by considering

complex behavior, actors, and their intentions" (p. 140). These decisions provide people

with the greatest benefit or satisfaction—given the choices available—and are in their

highest self-interest (Investopedia, n.d.).

Researchers are applying RCT to every aspect of society. As Hechter and

Kanazawa (1997) noted, genuine RCT is concerned exclusively with social outcomes

rather than individual outcomes. RCT in sociology takes into account the emotional

aspects of decision making and the fact that agents do not make decisions in a vacuum, failing to consider the cost of their decisions upon others.

Foy et al. (2018) suggested that RCT succeeds in economics because of its ability to predict economic behavior that could be empirically validated. However, this arena does not address conflicts related to sociological RCT (e.g., individual maximization of capitalism versus societal and emotional choices).

In discussing RCT through feminist eyes, England (1989) asserted an overabundance of research in social science has been conducted through male eyes and through the "glorified roles and traits traditionally associated with males" (p. 15). Women's role and the inclusion of emotions, empathy, and altruism have not been given the same credit or credence as have men's roles in society (England, 1989; Zafirovski, 2014). Foy et al. (2018) suggested that people are constrained in their choices by their social networks and other "non-rational" pulls" (p. 18), such as loyalty and altruism.

The dictionary definition of RCT for sociologists is that people behave as they do because the choices that they make have more benefits than costs (Investopedia, n.d.). Conversely, RCT for economics maintains that individuals always make prudent and logical decisions (Investopedia, n.d.). Based on the explanations above, sociological RCT was applied in this study. Utilizing CRT and RCT allowed me to build frameworks to explain the rational choices women of color in determining educational choices for their children and to hear their voices in their quest for education for their children.

Researcher's Positionality

I am a former English Language Arts teacher; I taught for several years at the high school level. I then became an administrator (Assistant Principal) of a public middle school. Thus, I have 15 years of experience in the public education system. As both teacher and administrator, I saw differences in the education of students dependent on the area of schools that they attended. Public schools in the city where I taught served 15,741 students, with 20% African Americans, 54% Hispanics, 25% Whites, and 1% Others (TEA, 2016-2017). There are currently 15 elementary schools, four middle schools, and four high schools in 44.4 square miles; 76% of the students are economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2016-2017).

I attended public schools in the same city in which I began as an educator, beginning in a segregated elementary school and moving to an integrated school in 1972, when I was in the fourth grade. I hated moving to a new integrated school across town for many reasons, more so because I was smart and an avid reader and writer who had received many positive reports from teachers on home visits. After integration, it seemed to me that I was seen as a problem; not one teacher made a home visit, even though my grades were always good. Later, my own children attended both public and private schools in the same city.

I knew how I was treated when the schools integrated; however, I thought that much had changed over the years. In reality, some things had changed, but some attitudes and ideas regarding children of color had not changed. When I became a teacher, I became an insider to what I thought was going on, but then I heard teachers

and principals tell Brown and Black (i.e., Latinx and African American) children that they were not college material and thus could not attend college. All the while, these teachers and principals were making preparations for their White sons and daughters to advance to the next level. It was as though they were withholding information and wanting to keep students of color in their place (generational poverty). I was swimming against the tide of low expectations for students of color and became a vocal opponent of this type of conversation in my presence.

Over time, my husband and I welcomed grandchildren into the world. As they approached school age, the family began to research schools that would be welcoming to these wonderful gifts to the world and would treat them as such. We checked the schools in their zip codes and the programs offered at each school. We looked at school ratings and report cards. I saw that at some schools the African American and Latinx children were still at the bottom of passing rates. We enrolled our then 4-year-old in an expensive, prestigious, primarily White private school. She learned her letters, they took pictures, and there were many opportunities for family visits, requests for more money and supplies. But she could not read.

After 2 years in the majority White (expensive), Pre-Kindergarten 1 and Pre-Kindergarten 2, my granddaughter still could not read. We worked with her, asking for recommendations and tutorials. At the end of the second year, the school recommended that she remain in Pre-Kindergarten 2 instead of going to Kindergarten. We went on the hunt again for a school. This led us to a local charter school. I checked the school's information and ratings. I also checked to see whether the teacher was certified to teach.

The charter school placed my granddaughter in first grade. Within a few months, she was reading everything in sight. She read signs, books, billboards—everything. We spelled words aloud and she knew the words. She was calling out mathematics problems. She was on the Honor Roll.

I noticed that the majority of students in her classroom were African American and or Latinx. I began to think about the rest of the parents and women of color in the school and how and why they had chosen this charter school for their children's education. Did these women of color locate and verify the same information as my daughter and I had done? Had they also investigated the school and the teachers? Did they know the passing rate for students of color? My daughter and I, women of color, had spent countless hours discussing the children's education. I wanted to know who and what reasons had influenced these women of color to make the decision to enroll their child in a charter school. This was the impetus for this research project.

Selection of Participants

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), the reason for selecting a sample is to gain information concerning the researcher's target population. In this study, women of color who choose charter schools for their children's education will constitute the sample. Thus, this study used a purposive sample, since it involved "selecting a sample based on the researcher's experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled" (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008, p. 175). I used snowball sampling, wherein I selected a few people who could identify other people who might be useful participants in the study. Snowball sampling is useful when possible participants are not found in the same area.

Random purposive sampling is described as having 20 potential participants but selecting only 5 to 10 of them to participate in the study. "This approach adds credibility to the study but is still based on an initial sample that was purposively selected" (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008, p. 177). It is of paramount importance to recognize that there is no such thing as a monolithic African American or Latina woman of color; therefore, the rationale for the purposeful sample was that the women of color may well be diverse with regard to social class, ethnicity, and school choices but similar with regard to their experiences of choosing a charter school.

Instrumentation

Qualitative researchers use various types of data collection instruments. The preliminary search for participants began as a participant observer as I picked up and took my grandchildren to school and attended school functions and field trips. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), a "participant observer is one who participates as a member of a group while making observations" (p. 193). I planned to locate 6 to 20 women of color who met the criteria (their children of color attend charter schools) via a demographic survey (Appendix D) or parent/guardian interest survey and then narrow the sample to four to six participants.

On this survey, I asked women of color to provide opportunities for longer interviews. Once participants agreed to interview(s), I utilized open-ended interview questions (Appendix E). I asked whether participants knew of other women of color who could be interviewed. These questions were developed in advance and given to women of color at charter schools in the same area where I and my children attended school. I

included my contact information with requests to contact me for follow-up interview questions. The actual number chosen for follow-up interviews was determined based on the survey responses. The participants' names were changed to protect their privacy.

The interviews were semistructured and open ended with eight respondents from the area charter schools to allow flexibility, probing, and the ability to gather information (Gall et al., 2005). Participants were women of color with children in charter schools.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted in English. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. The interviews were guided by semistructured, open-ended protocols. The semistructured interviews allowed flexibility to explore answers on a deeper level and to gather more information than could be obtained in a structured interview. Gall et al. (2007) explained that "the semi-structured interviews involve asking a series of unstructured questions and then probing more deeply with open-form questions to obtain additional information" (p. 246).

Participants were asked questions but were also encouraged to engage with me in less structured conversations "so that their hidden assumptions and constructions [will begin] to surface" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 91). The interviews were conducted in locations comfortable for the informants, with few interruptions. The timing for the interviews was up to the participants; however, I requested at least 30 minutes to an hour for each interview with permission to contact the interviewee in person or by telephone, when necessary, for follow-up questions. I took notes as soon as possible after the

interviews to capture the essence and nuances of the participants as they told their stories in their own words.

Data Collection

Erlandson et al. (1993) stated that the purpose of collecting data "in naturalistic inquiry is to gain the ability to construct reality in ways that are consistent and compatible with the constructions of a setting's inhabitants" (p. 81). Thus, the researcher must consider the viewpoints of the participants and then view those experiences in the same manner (Erlandson et al., 1993). Lunenburg and Irby (2008) suggested steps to be taken before, during, and after data collection. Before data collection, I developed materials, refined the questionnaire, screened participants, contacted participants by telephone, obtained informed consent from participants, and mailed a pre-contact letter. All steps complied with Texas A&M University's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) directions for human subjects. During data collection, I provided precise instructions, described what participants would be asked to do, determined the time between activities, provided information on how data would be collected and how participants would be debriefed. After data were collected, I debriefed participants regarding their interviews to ensure that their voices and stories had been appropriately heard. All participants' names were changed in the study for confidentiality and to protect their privacy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was guided by the goal of ensuring that the women of color revealed why they chose charter schools for their children's education. The interviews

were taped and transcribed verbatim. I analyzed the data for "similarities and differences, coding and categorizing, and constant comparison" (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 202). I developed categories from the information; they were formed, coded, and triangulated for both open-ended responses and participant interview data. I utilized a color code to represent themes as they emerged from the data. I kept a physical, tangible, audit trail of data collection and analysis in a locked cabinet. Overall, I utilized Creswell's (2009) six step process of analysis: (a) organize and prepare the data for analysis; (b) read or look at the data; (c) start coding the data; (d) use the coding process to generate a description of the setting, categories, or themes of analysis; (e) advance how themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative; and (f) make interpretations of the findings or results.

The interviews were conducted in English and transcribed by a third party. After all interview recordings were transcribed, I read through the transcripts to familiarize myself with the data. Then, I began the coding process.

Coding

I have been studying various coding techniques and meanings, as well as conducting a verbal and written survey to determine what others consider the best method for coding. The decision of whether to code by hand or utilize coding software was based on time and timing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). My initial goal was to start the process by using descriptive coding (summarize the primary topic of the passage), then utilize pattern coding (coding for patterns in the data), then move to in vivo coding (using the participant's language). I actually coded each of the interviews by hand, then

utilized descriptive coding and pattern coding. I cross-checked the initial codes and subsequent themes that emerged from the transcripts to gain a shared meaning of decisions and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) that women of color made in choosing charter schools for their children's education.

With parents' permission, I utilized archival data, such as report cards, student records, artifacts, and other documents to compare information, particularly for students who had left public schools to go to charter schools. Qualitative researchers can utilize archival documents as a valid source of data collection (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

Since this study was based on decisions that women of color make in choosing charter schools for their children, it was of utmost importance to address the issue of demographics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, educational level of the women of color, and zip code (to identify the assigned school district), along with the same information for the students, including age and grade level (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

Trustworthiness

It is imperative to gain the trust of the participants. I strove to ensure that the data were in the purest form and without bias. For this reason, validation strategies were implemented throughout the entire study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described "building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for information that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher or informants" (p. 207). Second, I ensured credibility of the study through triangulation, which involves varying the data sources and collection methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gall et al., 2007). Third, I ensured credibility via member checking. Member checking ensures "representation of

the emic perspective by member checking, which involves having research participants review statements in the report for accuracy and completeness" (Gall et al., 2007). Member checking allows participants (and the researcher) to correct factual errors, to collect more data to reconcile discrepancies, and, if necessary, to rewrite the report (Gall et al., 2007). Member checking was utilized especially in Theme 3, wherein participants were asked repeatedly whether their answers reflected their chosen order. Participants also had the opportunity to review the transcript and add or remove statements of their choosing.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANTS

The eight women selected for participation in this study are profiled in this chapter. The participants are profiled as a group based on the information learned from initial conversations and responses on their demographic questionnaire. Each participant is introduced to provide context on their decisions to choose the charter school as they navigated the educational system on behalf of their children.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the reason(s) women of color were choosing charter schools for their children's education. I collected qualitative data through face-to-face interviews with women of color who currently had a child or children in charter schools in Texas. I gathered data through observations, interviews, and audio recordings. This chapter provides demographic data from RCA (pseudonym) in Table 4. I introduce the interviewees, along with where I met them and whether or not their child or children attended traditional brick-and-mortar public schools (Table 5). The analysis depicts the voices of eight women of color who currently had children attending RCA.

Research Question

The research question came from my own experiences and questions about women's choices for their children. The research question was, *What decisions influence*

Table 4

2017-2018 Reliance Charter Academy Student Demographics

Race	*n*	%
African American	87	23.5
Asian American	2	0.5
Latinx American	194	52.4
Two or more races	10	2.7
White	77	20.8

the choices women of color make with regard to choosing charter schools for their children's education?

Reliance Charter Academy Demographics

RCA's student body is majority African American (Black) and Latinx (Hispanic), almost 80% of the enrollment consisting of students of color. According to the TEA's (2017-2018) *Texas Academic Report*, RCA had 370 students in Grades Pre-K through 8. The campus had 87 African American students (23.5%), two Asian students (0.5%), 194 Hispanic or Latinx students (52.4%), 10 students of two or more races (2.7%), and 77 White students (20.8%). There were 288 (77.8%) students classified as economically disadvantaged, 83 (22.4%) students were English Learners, and 180 (48.6%) were defined as at risk. There were 41 students with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, or behavioral disabilities. There were 32 staff members (6 males and 24 females), with no counselors; one teacher did not hold a degree, 24 had a

Table 5

Demographics of the Participants

Participant	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Initial Contact	Children	Initial School
1 Rae	African American	29	Knew before study	Blended family of 5	TPS and private school
2 Charla	African American	41	Snowball from R1	1 child	Never attended TPS or CS
3 Megan	African American	31	Snowball from R2	2 children	TPS
4 Penny	African American	41	Birthday party	2 children	TPS
5 Lydia	Latina	25	Birthday party	2 children	TPS
6 Amelia	Latina.	26	Snowball from R5	Blended family of 3	Never attended TPS
7 Sylvia	Latina	25	Snowball from R5	2 children	TPS
8 Idalia	Latina	50	Met at a charter school meeting	3 children	TPS and CS

Note. TPS. = traditional public school, CS = charter school.

Bachelor's degree, and 5 held a Master's degree. Twenty-six teachers (more than 79%) had less than 10 years of experience in teaching. Twenty-one teachers were White, 3 were African American, 4 were Hispanic, and 4 were of other races.

Overview of the Eight Women

I interviewed eight women who had children in RCA. I had planned to interview six women; however, there were issues with two interviews. In Penny's interview, I was unable to hear the recording due to the location of the ice maker in the restaurant. Penny's recording was sent to Rev.Com, a transcription service, which could not transcribe it. Megan was in such a rush to complete the interview that I could not obtain as much information as I needed to complete the interview. I took notes in both interviews, and I felt that I should utilize those notes due to their stories being compelling and integral to decisions and choices that participants made in choosing charter schools for the education of their children. There was good news. A few months after our initial interview, Megan reached out on social media with a friend request. I contacted her via the Messenger App, and she agreed to complete the follow-up interview by telephone.

I began each interview with the Survey of Parental Interest (Appendix D), which asked the participants whether they were the parent or guardian of a child or children attending a charter school. Other questions asked about the child's grade, how long the child or children had attended charter school, how the child traveled to and from school, the self-selected race select (African American/Black, Latinx, or biracial), and whether they would consider participating in a follow up interview by telephone. The purpose of the survey was twofold: (a) to ensure that they met the criteria for the interviews, and (b) for some, to calm them by asking demographic questions.

I met the first two women, Penny and Lydia, at a birthday party for a student from RCA. We struck up a conversation and I determined that both women had children at the charter school. Both agreed to be interviewed at a later date. Of the eight women whom I interviewed, two were from the birthday party, four were gained via snowball sampling method, one was a prior acquaintance, and the last was met at a charter school meeting.

Four of the women self-selected as African American and four self-selected as Latina. The average age of the women was 34 years, with the youngest 25 years old (Sylvia), two age 29 (Lydia and Rae), and the oldest 50 (Idalia). With the exception of one woman (Charla), all had multiple children. Six (Penny, Lydia, Sylvia, Rae, Megan, and Idalia) had children who had begun their education in traditional public schools and later moved to the charter school.

Two of the women (Rae and Idalia) were in blended families with children in both traditional public school and the charter school. Two (Charla and Amelia) had children who had never enrolled in traditional public schools. One (Penny) had moved her children from a larger city to this city to enroll them in RCA after being on the waitlist in her former city for an extended period of time. All eight women had personal reasons for choosing charter schools for their children's education. In the interviews, I heard their stories and garnered a rich picture of their choices as they navigated the educational system. Each of the women presented a unique set of dynamics throughout the interview. Some were noticeably nervous and some admitted to never having been interviewed.

I utilized semistructured interviews to obtain "descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 6).

The heading in Table 5, Initial School Information, shows whether the child or children had attended traditional public schools or only charter schools. For purposes of this information and inclusion, traditional public schools include public schools where the student was primarily zoned to attend. These traditional brick-and-mortar public schools were usually in the same neighborhood where the family resided. Charter schools are typically open enrollment and do not have zoned locations. Students can enroll in these charter schools based mainly on space availability.

Individual Profiles

Throughout our interviews, the participants impressed me with their ubiquitous responses. Even when noticeably nervous during the interviews, they remained unflappable and resolute in their decisions in choosing the charter school for their child or children's education. I provide a brief profile of each participant in this study to provide context to their decisions to attend Reliance Charter Academy (RCA).

Rae

Rae is a 29-year-old African American female. She arrived at the interview dressed casually in leggings and matching top, her hair pulled back in a sleek ponytail. Rae is married and in a blended family of five children. The oldest two, her husband's biological sons, are 11 and 10 years old and in the fifth and fourth grades, respectively. The father has custody of the boys and both currently attend traditional public schools in

their school zone. Both boys had attended RCA for less than a year. The next two children are Rae's biological children from a previous marriage. One is female, age 8, in the third grade at RCA. The other is a male, age 7, in the first grade at RCA. Rae and her husband have one infant daughter together. The parents both work outside the home. Rae's husband owns a car towing service and Rae buys and sells products via social media sites. Rae also holds a real estate license.

Rae's daughter was enrolled at RCA after spending 2 years at a predominantly White private school. Rae's son attended the private school for half of the school year. Both children had negative incidents at the private school, including frequent suspensions, which the school called "time outs." Both the son and daughter were the only students of color in their grades at the private school. The private school suggested that the daughter attend Pre-Kindergarten for the second consecutive year. After 2 years at the school, the daughter was unable to read and was told that she needed to continue in a Pre-Kindergarten class for the third year in a row. One day during an unscheduled visit, one of the teachers whispered to Rae and the grandmother that she felt that the youngest son was being picked on at the school by his teacher and the aide. The teachers stated that, since their classrooms shared a wall, she could hear the exchanges with the then 4-year old son. The teacher swore them to secrecy, requesting that they not tell the other teachers of her suspicions; otherwise, she could lose her job. After these incidents, the family left the private school and went in search of other schools. Rae is the reason for this study of how women of color locate schools, navigate, and access the

educational systems. Typical of the children in this study, her children rarely ride the school bus, as Rae is the primary mode of transportation for the children.

Charla

Charla arrived to the interview dressed in boot-cut jeans, neatly pressed shirt with a work logo over the front left pocket. Charla was a snowball participant from Rae. She is an African American female, age 41, with one son at RCA, and identifies with the LBGTQ community. Charla sports a short afro. She is a single mother and has "some college" experience, which she explained meant that she had been enrolled but dropped out, stating she "didn't like it" but wants her son to go further than she did. Her son is in third grade; this is his fourth year in charter school. Charla specified that her son began attending RCA in kindergarten. The son had not attended any schools other than RCA. Charla, Charla's mother, and Rae are her primary modes of transportation for her son to and from school, since she works long hours in the vehicle industry as a sales manager.

It was difficult to schedule the interview with Charla due to her busy schedule and long hours at work. We finally met almost 2 months after the initial conversation. Charla brought her son along. She seemed nervous and rushed during the interview. She answered the questions matter of factly but did not elaborate, even when asked to elucidate. I made several attempts to assure Charla that there were no wrong answers. For example, if I asked why her son attended the charter school, her response would initially be, "Because he needed to be in school." The interview was short, but I reached out to Charla for follow-up questions, which were answered, again with short and to-the-point responses.

Megan

I met Megan one morning after she dropped her son off at RCA. Megan is a self-described Black female, age 31, with auburn hair that she had pulled back into a ponytail. She has a thin build and was dressed in jeans, Western shirt, and cowboy boots. She and her husband own their own business; they ride horses and provide horse clinics and rodeos in the community. She has a son from a previous marriage and a pre-school-age daughter from her current marriage. Her son is in the eighth grade at RCA, where he has attended since third grade.

We set up the meeting several times; each time, Megan cancelled, stating that something had come up. When we did meet for breakfast at a local restaurant, Megan brought along the pre-school-age daughter. Megan seemed to be in a rush to leave almost as soon as she arrived, stating that she had to meet her husband at a job site. Efforts to engage her in a conversation were stifled due to her being rushed. Megan revealed that this was her son's last year at the charter school and she was concerned about where he would attend school for the next school year. We discussed a few questions, which are examined in later sections. We ended the interview early. I asked whether we could reschedule the interview, and she said that I could call her.

Penny

Penny is 41 years old, with neatly braided hair past her shoulders. She has a serious but friendly face, with a warm smile to match. Penny identifies as an African American female. Penny stated she had moved to this city from Houston about a year ago so that her two daughters could attend RCA. She stated that the eldest daughter is

currently in third grade and the youngest is in kindergarten. Penny and I had met at a birthday party. During the conversation, Penny had stated that her two children attended RCA. I asked whether we could meet for an interview at a time convenient for her. She provided her telephone number and I contacted her that week to schedule an interview. We met at a local Whataburger for dinner. Penny requested this location because it was near to the school, her home, and she could obtain dinner for her daughters and for herself. Penny provides transportation to the school in the mornings and the bus takes the children to an after-school community center in the afternoon.

During the course of the interview, Penny's cell phone rang. It was the girls' father. The eldest daughter excitedly exclaimed, "Mom, It's Dad! Can I go over there [gesturing to another table] to talk to him?" Penny, visibly holding in her emotions, quickly and emphatically stated, "No! You can sit and talk right here!" The eldest daughter sat and quietly talked to her father. I felt that Penny was listening so intently to their conversation that she was no longer paying attention to the interview questions. This became evident after I repeatedly asked questions without a response. Shortly after the telephone call began, Penny told the daughter to say goodbye and to tell the father that they would call him later. The eldest daughter was visibly upset. I attempted to continue the interview but was unable to ask additional questions for fear of exacerbating the emotional tension. This exchange, perhaps the presence of the children, and especially the telephone call, limited the interview. When I attempted to reach out again for a follow-up interview, I received no answer to the call. The calls were never returned. When I submitted the interview to Rev.Com, the subscription service, they

discovered that the sound of a nearby ice machine had made the transcription untranscribable. I included Penny in this dissertation due to the information she provided prior to the telephone call. I utilized my notes for Penny's portion of the interview.

Lydia

Lydia is a 25-year-old Latina female with brunette hair and hazel eyes. We met at a birthday party; after introductions and conversation, I discovered that she had two children attending RCA. The children, a boy and a girl, were in third grade and second grade, respectively. They had been at RCA for 2 years. Lydia stated that she provides transportation to school for her children in the mornings, "even though I pass two schools in my neighborhood" and the school bus takes them to an after-school program in the afternoon.

Lydia stated that she is the sole decision maker for her children's education. She expressed anger with the public school where her son had attended, as the school had "lost" him school bus, not once but twice. We made arrangements to meet at a local restaurant for the interview. Lydia arrived at the appointed time; her mother and child remained in the vehicle. Lydia provided names and phone numbers of two other Latina women who fit the criteria for the study.

Amelia

Amelia was a snowball participant referred by Lydia. Amelia is a 26-year-old single Latina with russet-colored shoulder-length hair, brown eyes, and bronzed skin. She has three children: a 5-year old son and two pre-school-age girls, ages 1 and 2 years. Amelia stated that she had dropped out of high school but had obtained a General

Equivalency Degree. She stated that she is proud of herself for "not giving up" on her education. We interviewed via telephone due to the ages of the youngest children.

Amelia's son is in Pre-Kindergarten at RCA. This is his first year at RCA. Amelia stated that she chose not to enroll her son in the neighborhood school and that he has never attended the local public school. The public school is closer than RCA, but Amelia stated that she provides transportation for her son each day because she prefers RCA over the local public school.

Sylvia

Sylvia is a diminutive 25-year-old raven-haired, brown-eyed Latina who is in what she calls "common-law marriage," meaning that she lives with her youngest child's father without the benefit of a marriage license. Sylvia is in a blended family with three children, ages 8, 6, and 2 years. Her eldest daughter, from a previous relationship, is in third grade at RCA. The 8-year old began Pre-Kindergarten at the public school in their neighborhood but Sylvia moved her to RCA prior to starting kindergarten.

Sylvia is not sure where her eldest daughter's father is but revealed that the step-father has been in her daughter's life since she was 3 years old. Sylvia also has a 2-year-old son and a 6-year-old stepdaughter. The stepdaughter does not attend the charter school and lives with her mother in another location. Sylvia stated that she is the primary mode of transportation for her daughter to attend school, taking her in the morning and picking her up in the afternoon.

Idalia

I met Idalia at a charter school meeting. Idalia is a 50-year-old Latina with slightly salt-and-pepper hair. She chose to meet at the public library and arrived wearing jeans and a T-shirt with a construction company logo. I arrived early and the librarians provided a quiet room for the interview. Idalia brought her youngest daughter, who remained just outside the door and completed assignments.

Idalia is married, with three children: a son and two daughters. She and her husband have a business in the city. At one time, all three children were attending RCA. The eldest daughter attended the charter school from seventh grade to tenth grade. The son attended from third grade to eighth grade and the youngest daughter began in first grade after having attended kindergarten at the neighborhood school. The eldest daughter is currently attending college but was the impetus for attending the charter school. Currently, only the youngest child, a female, is enrolled at RCA. Her son attended until his eighth-grade year, which is the last year students can attend RCA. He is currently in ninth grade at the local public high school.

I decided that including this interview could provide the unique bridge to capture a robust study of the choices that women of color make for their children as they navigate the educational system. Further, Idalia was the only woman of color who had all three of her children attending RCA. This was the factor that led to the decision to include her in this study, since she had a longitudinal perspective of RCA greater than that of the other parents. Further, all of the other children, with the exception of Megan's son, were in elementary grades at the time of the interviews.

After much organizing, data analysis, a multiplicity of coding rounds, and extended hours of reflection of the transcripts, I arrived at three themes. These three themes are discussed in Chapter V.
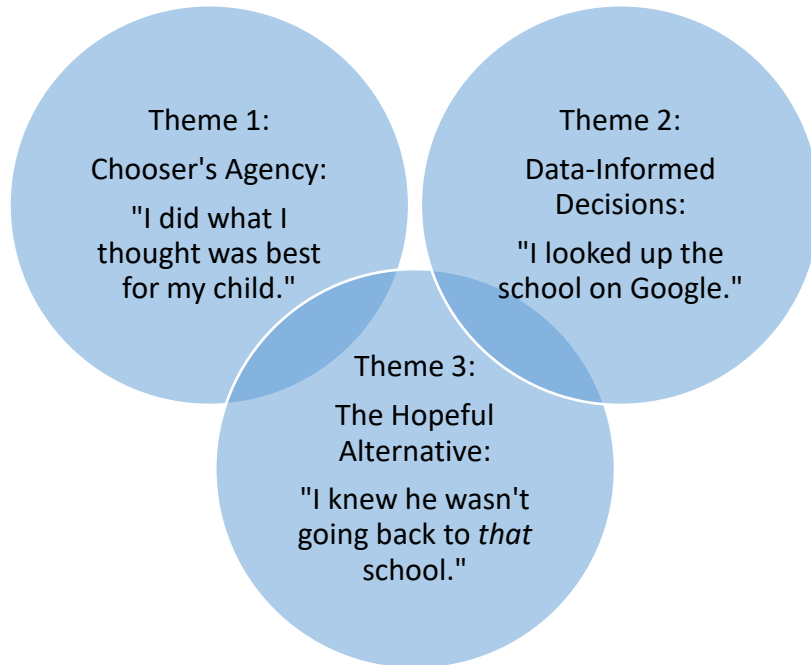
CHAPTER V

THEMES FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Three themes emerged from the interviews, capturing the essence of the

respondents' shared experiences: (a) Chooser's Agency: "I did what I thought was best

for my child"; (b) Data Informed Decisions: "I looked up the school on Google"; and

(c) The Hopeful Alternative: "I knew he wasn't going back to *that* school" (Figure 1).

In the third theme, this hopeful alternative is what the respondents called "a better

education," but this seemed elusive for them to define. I provided a list of seven

attributes of what one typically seeks in making an educational choice: (a)

academics/education, (b) school safety, (c) discipline, (d) class sizes, (e) location of

school, (f) race/ethnicity of students, and, (g) languages (home language spoken by the

students and/or languages offered by the school). I asked the women to rank these

attributes. Following a discussion of the themes, I explicitly provide answers to the

overarching research question. Lastly, a summary of the chapter is presented.

Theme 1: Chooser's Agency

In Theme 1, the women discussed making the best decisions for their children.

Within the chooser's personal agency, the women exercised their free will in arranging

what they thought was the best fit for their child or children. Personal agency refers to

the free-will choices that people make in life. These women were exercising their free

will in these decisions as they navigated the educational system. Several of the women

(Lydia, Sylvia, Idalia) mentioned the local zoning policy as a factor in their choice of

Figure 1

Themes From the Interviews

Theme 1:

Chooser's Agency:

"I did what I thought was best for my child."

Theme 2:

Data-Informed Decisions:

"I looked up the school on Google."

Theme 3:

The Hopeful Alternative:

"I knew he wasn't going back to *that* school."

where their children would be educated. Once the women had determined that RCA did not follow the zoning policy, they were excited about the educational possibilities for their children. Megan and Idalia mentioned that they initially thought that there were financial costs associated with attending RCA. When the women of color learned that there was no personal financial liability, that information sealed their decisions. Idalia, Megan, and Sylvia mentioned their initial thoughts of the charter school being a Catholic school due to the students wearing uniforms. However, once the women discovered that uniforms were a requirement but that the school was not a religious school, they enrolled their children. None of the women reported that transportation was an issue. Charla was

the only one who stated that she had assistance from her mother and a friend, Rae, in getting her son to and from school due to her work schedule. Once the personal checklist was met, the women enrolled their children in RCA. The personal checklist for the participants is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Women of Color Personal Checklist
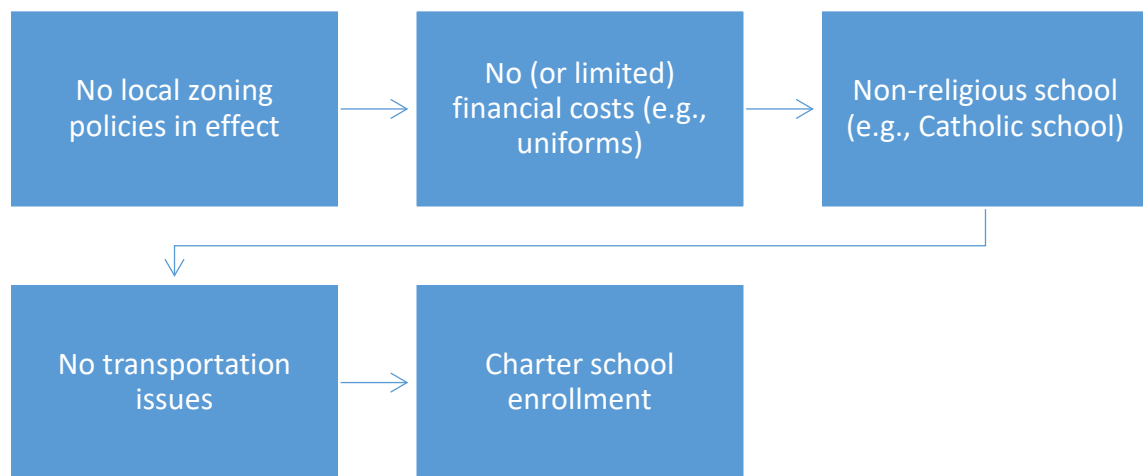
These women suggested that they managed the decisions for their children's education regardless of whether family members were in agreement. Often, when women of color are the choosers in the educational process, their decisions and their children's education are seen from a deficit perspective. I initially thought that the women's education levels, generally low, would be the primary reason for their focus on education for their children. I could not have been more wrong. In discussions with the women, it was clear that only three (Idalia, Rae, and Amelia) had dropped out of school,

and Rae and Amelia had returned later to for their General Equivalency Degree. Two of the women (Charla and Megan) had some college credits and one (Megan) was currently a sophomore in college. Seven had their high school diplomas.

As I reflected on the women, I first realized that what they had in common was the desire for more for their children's education, to make the best decision that they could with the available resources. They were resolute in the belief that they were doing the best thing and making the best choices for their children.

Second, six of the eight women mentioned school zoning policies that seemed to provide borders and walls to keep their children either in or out, depending on the location. For some, that fact that RCA was an open enrollment school, had space for their children, and did not charge tuition expedited the decisions by the women.

Third, it was interesting and surprising that all of these women were the primary decision makers about their children's' education, even when they had partners and significant others who co-parented with them. For instance, Sylvia disclosed that she was the primary maker of educational decisions for her daughter, although she involved her husband in the process. "I tell him this is what we are going to do. I tell him and then I just talk him into it." Even though her husband was aware of the decisions made for the child's education, it seems that he was notified after the decision had been made.

Although Sylvia has a significant other, her responses were similar to those of the other women in that she knew that she had to make the educational decision for her child due to the child's biological father not being in the child's life. Sylvia stated that she knew that her child would not attend the public school due to having problems in

Pre-K; since she was moving, the information she had about the school sealed her decision. Sylvia stated that her daughter has attended RCA since kindergarten and was now in her third year at RCA. Sylva knew that she was moving and that she did not want her daughter to attend the public school in her neighborhood. Sylvia exercised her personal agency when she chose to visit RCA and look beyond the school uniforms to determine the type of school that she wanted for her child. Not having school zones assisted Sylvia in making her decision.

> I was in the process of moving and like they have zoned areas. Like you can't go to a certain school. At [the charter school], it doesn't have zones and it was just a lot easier for me to take her. It does have a bus. [The zoned school] is closer, but I am okay with driving over there compared to walking down the street to a school where I know that's not as great, right? I just felt like it was easier to go to this school. I thought at first it was like a Catholic school or a private school, because they wear uniforms, but I found out it was a school that does not have zoning.

Penny's situation also indicated that she was the primary decision maker for her children's education. She did not mention whether the children's father had any bearing on the decision to move 100 miles away to attend this charter school. Penny explained her children's education was very important to her, so much so that she closed her home day care business and moved to this city so that her daughters could attend RCA.

> My oldest daughter was in a school there [in Houston] and I did not like the school that she was zoned for. There was a [Reliance Charter School] in my

neighborhood, but she was on the waiting list. After the second year of being on

the waiting list, I called around and found out that there were openings here, so I

closed my business and moved here. She has been attending this school since she

was in second grade and my youngest daughter since she was in Kindergarten. I

work here [in town] in a daycare. I would like another job, but I did what was

best for my girls.

Amelia, like Idalia, stated that she and her husband made the educational

decisions for their son, but she then interjected:

I mainly make the decision, but I do keep his dad in the loop, kind of like just

you know, tell him, but he just says, "If you think that is best, we'll go with that."

I just let him know what's going on.

Idalia is married but she made the decision to move the children to RCA due to

her eldest daughter being bullied at the neighborhood school. Idalia revealed that, once

her decision was made and she "checked out" the school, she discussed it with her

husband. After it was determined that RCA did not have zoning, Idalia moved all three

of her children to RCA. (When RCA opened, it was a K–Grade 12 campus; the school

later change to PK–Grade 8). Idalia stated that her eldest daughter had attended RCA

from Grade 7 to Grade 10. Her son had attended RCA from Grade 3 to Grade 8 and her

youngest daughter was currently at RCA in the eighth grade.

There were commonalities in the decisions made by these women. Since Penny's

interview was so limited, I cannot make the determination on whether she received the

educational support, albeit seemingly limited, as did Sylvia and Amelia. Whereas

Sylvia's and Amelia's husbands were informed about the children's schools, the women were in reality just letting them know about the decisions.

On the other hand, Rae was clear that her reasons for choosing RCA differed from her husband's choice. Although they did not agree on school choice, Rae stated that she alone makes the educational decisions for her biological children and her husband makes the educational decisions for his biological children.

He does what he wants to do for the boys and I do what I am going to do for my two. They will not be going to public school until they are much older, so that they can have a head start on their education. He thinks the public school [where the boys currently attend] is like it was when he was going to school, but it's not like that anymore. He can't see that though, so he makes the decision for his and I will make the decisions for mine. He made the decision to take the boys out of RCA because they were struggling academically coming from [name of school]. I wouldn't send them [to public school] and if I did have to send them, it would be in high school where they can already have a head start versus the children that's already been there.

The school that Rae's husband had attended as a child was often listed as a Blue Ribbon School at the time of his attendance. This was the highest distinction for schools based on student performance on state standardized tests. However, the principal retired years ago and the school had not received the distinction in as many years. Regardless of his decisions and even in disagreement, Rae was adamant that her decision was best for her biological children.

Rae's comments were similar to Megan's situation in that there were obvious disagreements within the family on where to send the children to school. With Megan, the issue was not with the child's biological father or with his stepfather but with Megan's father, the child's biological grandfather. Megan stated that she was at odds with her father because he wanted his grandson to attend the public school. According to Megan, her father was basing his decision on the son's size rather than on his educational needs. Megan's father wanted the grandson to attend the local public school so he could play sports.

> He [her son] is very tall and big for his age. People think he plays sports, but he does not want to play sports. He likes to read and write. He is a nerd. When I asked him if he wants to play sports, he told me he doesn't want to. My father [his grandfather] is upset that he is not at [public school] because he wants him to play football, but he is not interested in football. He wants to work with computers. He loves them! The school sent him to a camp in the summer at Texas A&M for computers. He likes to do that rather than play sports. My daddy thinks he can be the next big football player. So he [the grandfather] is upset with my decision to send him to RCA. I really don't want to send him to public school at all though.

Although this decision caused a rift in the father-daughter relationship, Megan was unwavering in her determination to make the best decisions for her son. She took into account her son's needs and desires. When I asked Megan to provide clarification

on what she meant by her son being a "nerd," she responded, "He likes computers, he likes to read, he is learning other languages, and he doesn't like sports at all."

Like the other women, Lydia and Charla were the primary decision makers for their sons' education. Charla stated her son had never attended public schools and that she had enrolled him in RCA after her sister told her about it. Charla responded to the question matter of factly: "I heard good things about the school. I wanted him to get a good education, so I chose this school." Lydia discussed problems with the public school that her son would have attended in preschool. Lydia was adamant about the child not returning to the school the next year.

> My son was in public school at [name of school]. I was very unhappy at [name of school]. I felt like he was having some problems, but the teachers didn't seem to care about my son. They wanted to put him back a grade, but they did not tell me he was behind until the end of the year. I was at the school a lot and they could have told me he was having problems. They just showed me they didn't care. After I found out [RCA] did not have the zoning rules, I knew that he wasn't going back to [name of school].

All of the women seemed satisfied with the choices that they had made for their children's education. With man-made barriers out of the way, such as neighborhood zoning, school tuition or funding, transportation, and uniforms, the choice to enroll in RCA was clear-cut, at least for these women. They unanimously chose the charter school based on their own terms and information, not necessarily on the data systems that researchers and educators might utilize.

Theme 2*:* Data-Informed Decisions

When people consider data-informed decision making, it is inferred that the data are retrieved from formal reports, such as consumer chronicles, news commentaries, and organizational or governmental data. In this theme, the eight women discussed making data-informed decisions, often not based singularly on formalized data sources (e.g., school websites, TEA and government information). For these women, word of mouth seemed more important than formalized data sources. Six of the women (Lydia, Sylvia, Idalia, Rae, Charla, and Amelia) revealed that they had either heard the information from someone else or had passed on the charter school information to someone else. Four said that they had "looked up" the school information utilizing the Google search engine or information from Facebook. Penny and Megan stated that they had been looking for another school and knew that it would be a charter school. Idalia was the only participant who stated that she had based her decision about RCA based on a postcard and flyers that she had received and by "going into" the school to determine whether there was availability for her three children. Three women (Sylvia, Lydia, and Idalia) mentioned concern about the school uniforms that they saw on the websites or in pictures. Even though uniforms were a requirement, this information did not alter their decisions. Transportation was also considered a nonfactor, although mentioned by the women in choosing the charter school. In retrospect, RCA has one bus, but all of the parents reported that they took their children to school in the morning and picked them up in the afternoon. Only Penny and Lydia indicated that their daughters rode the school bus in the afternoon to attend an afterschool program at another location.

Rae was the only participant who had utilized formalized data from TEA in addition to receiving assistance in determining where to look for information on the traditional public schools and open charter schools in the city. Rae discussed her foray into the educational distinctions, embedded information located in school websites, and TEA formats in her search for a school after the debacle with her two children. After the teacher at the predominately White private school had told Rae that her son was being picked on, Rae researched schools in the area, both traditional public schools and other charter schools. Rae's friend, Charla, also provided information on RCA after her son was enrolled there. Despite her daughter's age, Rae enrolled her in kindergarten because she could not read. However, RCA placed her in the first grade because of her age. Within 6 weeks of attending RCA, the daughter was reading and spelling fluently. The next year, Rae enrolled her son in kindergarten at RCA. He was found to have dyslexia, and the school and parent worked together to assist him in his education. Rae disclosed that she also "looked up" the school on Google and Facebook and discussed the information with her husband's friend, Charla. Rae provided further explanation.

> It was mid-year when I took my son out [of the private school] and at the end of the year when I took my daughter, who's the oldest out, and I picked the charter school. There are schools within five miles of my house, but I drive them everyday and pick them up. I chose this particular school because it was the closest one and I heard good things about it. I read their reviews on *Google* and I saw mostly good reviews. But mostly, [name of person] referred me. I used one other site. I don't recall what it was, and I also used Facebook to look at their

reviews as well. I also knew someone who went there previously and had success when they had first opened before I even had children. This charter school was ranked number one in Texas as far as the state information said.

Charla and Lydia's information initially came from other women in their families. The other respondents relied on either word of mouth or searches on social media. In Charla's case, her sister provided the information regarding RCA. In Lydia's situation, her cousin Sylvia told her about RCA. Charla discussed her educational search

I didn't have any of the research. He was going to [name of daycare], but this wasn't a school. My sister told me about the school. I heard good things about the charter school. I looked it up on *Google* and I read what it said on there. I thought it would be smaller classes. Like I said, the scores are pretty good, so I wanted to go with that. Then, I told my friend [Rae's husband] about me going to the school and my son going. I talked to Rae, too. I told her I like it and he liked it. I heard good things about the charter school. The scores are pretty good, so I wanted to go with that. My friend also told me it was a good school. My family [a sister and a brother] all went to public school. It's very important. I wanted him to get a good education, so I chose this school.

Lydia, like Charla, utilized word of mouth and maintained that she had found out about RCA from her cousin Sylvia, who had already moved her child from the traditional public school. Lydia indicated that she used technology when she "googled the school" but that she had also followed her cousin's suggestion.

My cousin, Sylvia, told me about this school. The only thing I checked online

was to see what kind of school it was, because I saw they were wearing uniforms,

so I thought it was going to be a Catholic school or a private school. Some of my

friend's kids were going there, so I figured she [her cousin] had already told me

like, you know how they are and stuff like that, and I was like, wow, I was like

agreeing with her [after visiting the school]. She had her daughter in there and

her daughter is a year older than mine. I actually told my other friend to put her

son in there and she did. I told my cousins to put their kids in there and they also

attend the school.

Sylvia also found out about RCA from friends. Once her children were enrolled,

she began to tell others about the school. Sylvia commented that her main concern had

been about school uniforms.

My friend said it was a good school. When I googled the school, I saw that the

children wore uniforms but it's something different when I first thought about it,

I was like no. I kind of don't want to put her in a school that have to wear a

uniform because she didn't get to show her personality, but then I realized like,

why they do the uniform, and I was like, okay, well we can give it a try then.

Sylvia informed Lydia about RCA. Lydia informed Amelia about RCA. After

speaking with Lydia, Amelia stated that she had "looked on Facebook" and "googled the

school." Amelia indicated that she drove past several other schools, including another

charter school, on her way to taking her child to RCA. Amelia never enrolled her son in

a public school after conversations with Lydia. Transportation was not a problem for her son to attend RCA.

> I passed by it literally every day, but [name of school] is not too far out of my way. I do choose to pick him up and drop him off instead of him riding the bus and that's just being a parent and making sure my baby gets to school. I did look up [name of school] on Facebook, oh yeah, I think I also Googled the school, you know to see what else I could find, but my mind was made up after talking to Lydia.

Once it was determined that RCA did not follow the local zoning policy, Lydia made up her mind that she would give the charter school a try.

> Actually, we saw it when it was being built, but I thought you had to be, you know, zoned, for the school. After my cousin got in, I went to visit the school. The teachers made time to talk to me. My son liked it even from the first time walking in. I felt, you know, comfortable there. The teachers were helpful and they are both doing very good in school. He is not in trouble and he likes to come to school now. He has friends there, too, plus his cousins are there, too. I wanted them to have a good education. I think they are getting one now. The teachers even have tutorials on Saturdays for students if they need it. They really try for students to do good. I like it.

Sylvia also utilized word of mouth within her social networks.

> My friend told me, then one of my cousins, and then I told one of my cousins and a friend. It was based on my friend that had her daughter there, and her daughter

is one year older than mine and she told me what it was about and stuff like that. So she was like, you should try it and I did and I actually told my friend to put her son in there and she did. I was already moving though, so I just said I will just try to get that one. My friend said it was a good school.

Idalia specified that she had received information from the charter school via postcards and flyers mailed to her home address but that she also discussed the school with a friend. Idalia mentioned seeing the students in uniforms "on the pictures" and thought that perhaps it was a Catholic school or a private school. She assumed that there was an associate cost; however, after talking with a friend, she realized that it was open enrollment and there was no cost to attend. Once she determined that enrollment was free and neighborhood zones were not an issue, Idalia enrolled all three of her children.

Megan and Penny were the only participants who went in search of a charter school but they did not explicitly state that they had utilized Google or any of the formal educational websites. Both women stated that they had been displeased with the public schools in the areas and both wanted changes. Penny recalled, "I called the school [in this city] and they told me that that had openings for both of my girls. I enrolled them right away." Megan felt that the school was putting too much pressure on her son to get good grades on standardized tests. This pressure increased when he was in third grade, so much so that he developed test anxiety. She stated that she knew that she had to get him out of that school system but could not afford a private school:

This is his last year at RCA. I don't know what I am going to do next year. [He] will be going to public school. He has been going here six years, since he was in

third grade. All of his friends are here. He was in third grade when I decided to move him due to his severe testing anxiety. The teachers were more concerned with him passing that test that he began having nightmares about it. It took him a long time to finish the test because he wanted to get every answer right. I think the teachers were putting too much pressure on him because he was smart. Anyway, this was too much for my child. Considering my financial status at the time there wasn't room for me to consider a private school. Therefore, RCA was my next best option.

These women were by no means wealthy. They would not be considered to be in the higher echelons of society or even members of the local business or professional organizations in the community. What they had in common was their position that education matters and their desire for their children to receive the best possible education.

Theme 3: The Hopeful Alternative

In the third theme, The Hopeful Alternative, these women of color all seemed to be hopeful that the charter school had or would provide "something" that the traditional public schools had not provided. One thing was clear: They knew that they were not going back to "*that* school." During the interviews, I specifically asked participants to rank the importance of the characteristics of the charter school, listed in alphabetical order: academics/education, class size, discipline (related to school policies), language classes offered or based on home language spoken, location, race/ethnicity of the students, and school safety. The term *academics* was applied interchangeably with the

term *education*. To ensure that the respondents would not answer in the proffered order, ,

I changed the order each time I interviewed. I read the list to the participant two or three

times to ensure that I recorded their ranking. For example, I asked Sylvia to rank the

choices in the order most important to her, offering the following order: language, class

size, school safety, discipline, race or ethnicity, location, and education. Sylvia chose the

following order in her ranking: education, class size, school safety, location, discipline,

language, and race/ethnicity of the school. I read the list back to her and asked her to

confirm the order. She stated that this order was correct.

The participants' rankings are presented in Table 6. Prior to asking the

participants for their ranking, I asked questions such as (a) How important was location

in choosing this school? Are there schools located in your neighborhood, and if so, how

close would you estimate they are to your home? (b) How important is the race or

ethnicity of students in the school? Is it important for your child to be at the school with

same-race students? (c) How important is education or academics in choosing this

school? (d) Was academics a factor in your decision to choose this school? and (e) How

important is school safety to you? Where would you rank school safety? I provided wait

time to determine whether the participant had anything to add to the discussion.

I followed the same questioning format for class size, school discipline, and

language spoken in the home and taught in school. In the follow-up telephone

interviews, I repeated their ranking and asked them to confirm their order. Although the

rankings varied on the second through seventh items, with the exception of one woman

(Amelia), all chose academics or education as the most important reason to choose the

Table 6

Participants' Rankings of the Importance of Considerations in School Choice

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rae	Education	Location	Class Size	Safety	Discipline	Language	Race
Charla	Education	Safety	Discipline	Class Size	Race	Location	Language
Megan	Education	Safety	Class Size	Location	Language	Race	Discipline
Penny	Education	Class Size	Safety	Location	Discipline	Language	Race
Lydia	Education	Discipline	Safety	Class Size	Language	Location	Race
Amelia	Safety	Education	Location	Discipline	Language	Class size	Race
Sylvia	Education	Safety	Class Size	Discipline	Location	Language	Race
Idalia	Education	Discipline	Safety	Class Size	Language	Location	Race

charter school for their children's education. Charla and Megan ranked language and discipline, respectively, as the least of their personal concerns. On the other end of the ranking scale, six of the eight women ranked race as the least important reason for choosing the charter school for their children's education.

Lydia, Sylvia, Idalia, Rae, and Megan discussed problems at the schools that their children were attending, which provided the impetus to seek other schools. Lydia's situation was the most extreme, as the school was unable to locate her son at the end of the school day. He was lost twice on the bus when he was in Pre-Kindergarten. Lydia recalled that the school did not provide information that her son was struggling. Both of these issues were at the fore in her mind as she made the decision to change schools. The

lack of safety precautions for her son and his "failing PK" added fuel to her

determination to leave the neighborhood school.

> The first time he was lost on the bus, I got a call from the school. We went to the
>
> school while they were trying to find him. The bus barn called the buses, but the
>
> principal did not seem too concerned to me. He was only in pre-kindergarten. I
>
> wanted to know how this happened. I was frantic, but they kept me calm saying
>
> they would find him. They did find him. He got on the bus with his cousins, but
>
> nobody checked his tag [what students wear to identify how students get home
>
> each day: walk, car, or bus]. But I could understand that and it was the beginning
>
> of school, so I understood that. But, the second time, they lost him on the bus,
>
> they should have known to check the tags. We didn't get a call. He just didn't
>
> show up at home at the right time, so we went to the school. This is when the
>
> principal didn't seem too concerned about him being lost. That's when I started
>
> looking around for a school. I said if they are not concerned about him being lost
>
> on the bus, they are not concerned about him at all. So, that's why I left [name of
>
> school].

Lydia disclosed that, by the end of the year, she knew that she would not return

to the traditional public school. She made the decision to leave the neighborhood school

in the hope of gaining a better education for her son.

> I was very unhappy at [name of school]. I felt like he was having some problems,
>
> but the teachers didn't seem to care about my son. They wanted to put him back a
>
> grade, but they did not tell me he was behind until the end of the year. I was at

the school a lot and they could have told me he was having problems. They just

showed me they didn't care. I was there and they didn't tell me anything.

When Sylvia was asked about her daughter's education, like Lydia, she stated

that her daughter had had difficulty in Pre-Kindergarten at the traditional public school

but the teachers had not helped her.

She was having some problems at [the school name], like she wasn't reading on-

level that she was supposed to or like they thought she wasn't. So, when we

switched her to the other school [RCA], they were more understanding. They

took the time to help her. Her teacher told me to take her to the eye doctor and

we found out she had, how do you say, astigmatism, and she needed glasses.

Before she even got glasses, the teacher moved her to the front of the room, and

she would make the letters bigger so that she could read them, plus she would

work with [her] to make sure she understood the work. I talk to her all the time

about education, about going to school, and the cool programs that are in school.

Sylvia stated that academics or education was at the top of her list and the chief

reason that she chose this charter school. The rest of her ranking was school safety, class

size, discipline, location, language, and race. Sylvia voiced disappointment with the

neighborhood school on more than one occasion, stating that the school should have

provided more information on her child's well-being.

I talk to her all the time about her education. I still talk to her about it. But now,

she is actually excited to go to school. There are smaller classes. I just felt like it

was easier to go to this school. Once I moved, she would be zoned for

somewhere else, so I like, talked to her, and she really likes the schools. It worked really great because it helped her out a lot. She wears glasses and they [the teachers] help her out a lot. I know that's my kid, but they [teachers at previous school] never told me nothing. I wish [name of school] was closer to me or I was closer to [name of school], but since I like the school, I don't mind driving that far. Well, it's not too far for me, compared to walking to a school where I know it's not as great, right?

Idalia disclosed that she chose the charter school for her eldest daughter because she had been bullied at the public school. The child had attended three zoned schools, from elementary to middle school, before attending RCA in seventh grade.

She was shy. She wasn't getting along with several other students at [the school]. She was stressed out due to conflicts and things like that. It was affecting her studies. I felt like she was being bullied and the school wasn't doing anything about it. She wasn't keeping up with her homework. She just kept having problems at school, so I moved them all at the same time.

I asked Idalia what had kept her at the charter school and what she liked most about it. She responded,

I like the way they work with the kids. Sometimes, they can be, you know, strict with them. But to me, it's a way of keeping an eye on them. They pay more attention to the kids. Okay, they listen, they pay attention to them and help them out more, you know with their scores and they have tutorials, which is on Saturdays. I mean even if they don't want to go, they tell me they are invited.

They are not obligated to go over there, but they are invited. And you know, if

they want to go, that's what I like about it because I remember when my son was

in [name of school]. I went to get him help and they said he doesn't qualify for

the help. Even if you want extra help, they can't get it if they don't qualify?!

Right. Well, you get to know their teachers. You find out who the teachers are -

who pays attention.

Rae also discussed the process of change that had led to her decision to search

for schools as she processed what had occurred with her two children at the private

school.

There were discipline issues all of the time at the private school. They made them

sit in the "practical chair." I didn't like how they did referrals for kids being so

young and I didn't like for them to be sitting out for extended periods of time. I

wanted them disciplined fairly and equitably. I figured that would be a better

option for both of them. It was important, I wanted them to be in an environment

where they made friends, where they weren't bullied, and where they were

comfortable in an environment where they could learn. Since I have a son who is

dyslexic, I don't want them to get behind.

Rae also discussed moving to RCA for the academics. When I prompted her to

explain her perceived difference in what her child was learning in charter school

compared to what the older boys (in fourth and fifth grade in the traditional public

school) were learning, she explained,

The charter school education, they have a different curriculum, and they have a different curriculum than public school, and they take more time learning so nobody's really behind. Yes, public school is a year behind charter school, as far as academics, so they're passing, but my third grader is still helping my fourth grader with his homework. But also because there are so many distractions in public school, so they have to keep stopping, so they're behind. More students are in public schools, a lot of them are in tutorials, and they are not doing well because there are too many distractions from behavior issues with other students.

Like Rae, Charla ranked education first because she tells her son daily about being prepared and working toward a good education.

It's very important. I want him to get a good education. I went to college, but I came back after a year. I don't think I was prepared. I want him to be prepared. Like I said, I heard some good things about it. The scores are pretty good, so I wanted to go with that. It has smaller classes. I think this is a good school to help him.

Amelia called RCA a "hands-on school" that helped the students to have a quality education. Amelia was noticeably nervous during the interview, continually apologizing, "I'm sorry. I'm bad at this! I have never been interviewed before." I had to reassure her several times that she was doing a great job in the interview and that there were no wrong answers. When I asked her why she chose the charter school over the traditional public school, she responded,

I never thought of it, but I just heard about a charter school from my friend and

her daughter enjoyed it so much. The school, they help you. It's a hands-on

school. They, you know, they show that they care and you know, they're more,

what's it's called, it's kind of hard to explain, just more hands on. I like them.

[He] absolutely loves school. What made the decision for me though, what

settled that decision for me was when we went to go do a showing of the school

before we even filled out anything, it was my son's facial expression. He was so

excited to come to the school, like he was saying it was his school before he went

to school.

Chapter Summary

The research question that guided this study was, *What decisions influence the*

choices women of color make with regard to choosing charter schools for their

children's education? The participants were adamant that they were making personal

and individual decisions based on their own family dynamics, personal resources, and

information about educational opportunities. What connected them was that they were

the primary decision makers on where their children attended school. All were

convinced that RCA would provide the educational opportunities that they needed, based

on the knowledge that they had available, word of mouth, and assessments on social

media sites. These women were navigating the educational system and making the best

choices that they could with their available resources. These women of color, such as

Rae, Lydia, Idalia, and Megan, are utilizing RCT in calculating the costs and benefits of

their choices amid some very emotional situations that occurred with their children. CRT

was employed as participants told their own stories. Although race was listed as the last consideration by all eight respondents, it is reasonable to conclude that race became a less important focus due to almost all students being students of color.

Three themes emerged from analysis of the data: (a) Chooser's Agency: "I did what I thought was best for my child"; (b) Data-Informed Decisions: "I looked up the school on Google"; and (c) The Hopeful Alternative: "I knew he wasn't going back to *that* school." These themes addressed the research question.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS,

AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I discuss the meaning of the findings in terms of the existing body of literature on women of color choosing charter schools for their children's education, as well as in relation to the theoretical framework for the study. I conclude with a discussion on the implications of the study for future research and practice. The chapter is presented in five sections. The first section presents an overall summary of the study, followed by a discussion of the findings and implications. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and the conclusion.

Summary of the Study

I sought to examine the decisions that women of color, specifically Latinx and African American women, make as they choose charter schools for their children's education. I use the term *women* rather than *mothers* in order to include women whose roles might be parent or guardian of school-age children in charter schools. This study was designed to (a) understand their reasons for choosing charter schools rather than public schools for their children's education, (b) add to the discussion regarding their navigation of school choices, and (c) hear their voices as they described their decision-making processes. Existing literature provides very little research on the decisions that women of color make in choosing charter schools for their children's education. In fact,

Cooper (2009) noted that how people of color think about school choice is rarely a part of the conversation and is often considered from a deficit perspective.

The research question was, *What decisions influence the choices women of color make with regard to choosing charter schools for their children's education?*

This study was conducted at various locations in the city, such as restaurants, the local library, and a home. Locations were chosen by the participants. Eight women of color participated in the study, four of whom self-identified as Black or African American and four of whom self-identified as Hispanic or Latinx. All had children in various grade levels attending a local charter school (RCA). The women were selected using purposive and snowball sampling.

The interviews were conducted in English, which was the language each of the participants chose to speak. The interviews were conducted in a semistructured format to allow participants to share their stories and to allow the researcher to probe for further information. Follow-up questions were conducted via telephone calls. All participants signed a statement agreeing to participate in the study on their own accord. Each was offered a $25 gift card to either Wal-Mart or HEB Grocery Store. Only one participant declined the card.

This research was conducted using a qualitative design. Merriam (2002) determined that qualitative researchers seek to understand how to interpret individuals' interactions at a particular moment in time and in a specific context. Qualitative research is based on multiple truths constructed by the experiences of the research subjects and not measured by scientific facts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lozano, 2015). A qualitative

researcher observes changes in the informants' mood, voice, body language, and other situational or environmental issues that may influence responses (Babbie, 2017). Moreover, as Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) noted, qualitative research poses questions such as, *what, how, to what extent*, and *in what way*? These questions allow the researcher to collect information by interview a multiplicity of respondents.

CRT and RCT were employed as the framework for this study. By framing the study in CRT, the goal was to provide opportunities for people of color to tell their own stories, or counternarratives, in their own words (D. Bell, 1992). Yosso (2006) explained that CRT is focused on understanding, studying, and transforming the interrelationships among race, racism, and power. One premise of CRT is to utilize the counterstory methodology for people, often people of color, who have been silenced by the dominant group. By sharing their stories and using their own voices, they can reveal that others may have similar experiences. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued that "minority status brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism" (p. 10). Utilizing the CRT framework places emphasis on narratives, counternarratives, and storytelling to provide opportunities to challenge the dominant culture's voice and give voices to marginalized views held by those who have been unheard or even silenced (D. Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010). As Delgado (1989) stated, "Stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (p. 2414).

Equally important, RCT considers individual behavior to be a function of structural constraints and the sovereign preferences of individuals and posits that people behave as they do because they believe that performing their chosen actions has more

benefits than costs (Scott, 2000). RCT sociologists Hechter and Kanazawa's (1997) research indicated that RCT makes the assumption that people choose on the basis of the best information available, that the choices are not monolithic, and that the choices must include culture and identity. Thus, it is imperative when discussing culture, race, and equity to "position and situate [personal] privileges, oppression, and assumptions" (Milner, 2017, p. 72) in order to hear the voices of marginalized people who have not been heard or listened to before (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Sociologist researchers are applying RCT to every aspect of society. RCT is concerned with social outcomes rather than individual outcomes and takes into account the emotional aspects of decision making and the fact that agents do not make their decisions in a vacuum (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). This was imperative to remember in conducting interviews with these eight women of color. Grounding the research in these two theories allowed me to hear these African American women and Latinas tell their individual stories of navigating their own paths (S. Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Leonardo, 2012) in making choices for their children's education in charter schools in Texas. Both CRT and RCT led to understanding their decision making.

To analyze the data, I utilized Creswell's (2009) six-step process of analysis: (a) organize and prepare the data for analysis, (b) read or look at the data, (c) start coding all of the data, (e) use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well a categories or themes for analysis, (e) advance how themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative, and (f) make the interpretations of the findings or results. I

conducted a line-by-line reading of the interview transcripts to develop a general understanding of the participants' experiences. Next, I went through each transcript and my notes and highlighted key words or phrases that captured the respondents' experiences. These phrases were grouped to develop clusters of meaning as I combed the data for categories and themes. Three themes emerged to capture the essence of their experiences: (a) Theme 1: Chooser's Agency: "I did what I thought was best for my child"; (b) Theme 2: Data-Informed Decisions: "I looked up the school on Google"; and (c) Theme 3: The Hopeful Alternative: "I knew he wasn't going back to *that* school."

The women in this study were adamant that they were making the best choices for their children's education. They were making sacrifices in providing daily transportation to the charter school, purchasing required uniforms, and following the school's written and unwritten policies. The women had entered the meridian of school choice reform and were now centered in the educational market-place. They had entered the political foray, perhaps without even realizing that they had made a controversial political statement in their choice of a charter school. There are certainly proponents and opponents of charter schools. However, the political conundrum seemed to be of little or no concern to these women. They simply desired a free and appropriate education for their children that they deemed that their neighborhood schools did not provide.

Discussion

Politicians and leaders have identified education as the new civil rights issue of contemporary times (Bush, 2002; Gambano, 2015; King, 2017; Obama, 2011; Robinson, 2016). Against this backdrop, charter schools have gained momentum in the political

and educational milieu in the past 30 years, since the first charter school opened in 1991. During that time, charter schools have attracted proponents and opponents. Regardless of the political climate, or even which political party was in charge of education, charter schools quickly became an increasingly utilized choice for families, particularly families of color, who were navigating the educational system for their children. There are more students of color in charter schools, schools are competing in a market-based economy, and charter schools are becoming more segregated, with a large number of students of color opting out of public schools and attending charter schools. Few researchers have asked women of color why they are choosing charter schools for their children's education. This study provides a foundation to explore this research area in greater detail. The findings are discussed in terms of the three themes.

Theme 1: Chooser's Agency: "I Did What I Thought Was Best for My Child"

The first theme acknowledged that the experiences of the women of color were not all positive in the traditional public school setting. The majority were simply unhappy with the neighborhood school and made the decision to opt out of traditional public school. Five women reported that the primary reason for the move to RCA was based on challenges or negative interactions in the public or private schools that their children had attended prior to moving to RCA. One of the participants unenrolled her daughter from her neighborhood school, sold her home business, and moved 100 miles in order to have her two daughters attend the local charter school. Two of the women in this study had children who had never attended traditional public school and they were adamant that they would not enroll their children in neighborhood schools.

When they did consider enrollment in the public school, it was only because of a lack of choice, particularly because the charter school serves only Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 8. Two of the women expressed concern about their children attending traditional public schools at the end of their school year at RCA. The opening of the charter school provided a gateway to the market-based school choice reform policy and the competitive nature of school choice. The women in this study were empowered to exercise choice and thereby escape the perceived failings of their neighborhood school.

I define a chooser's agency as the ability to act as one's own agent in making choices based on available information. The women activated their agentic choices by participating as equal powerholders, rather than as bystanders, in choosing the charter school (Cooper & Christie, 2005; Fine, 1993; De Gaetano, 2007; Noguera, 2001). The women were adamant that they had made the best choice for their children. Early studies on charter school enrollment suggested that the charter school choice appeals to parents of color, because they are seeking increased opportunity, control, accountability, voice, and choice in their children's schools (Allen & Jewel, 1995; Anderson, 1988; Henig, 1996; H. M. Levin, 1972).

This finding provides a counternarrative to Abrams and Gill's (2002) research analysis of White women's choices for educating their children. They identified that a perceived difference for White women who were making decisions for their children's education as they were considered to be positively accessing power and being seen as privileged and in charge. Stakeholders (school leaders and other parents) did not question their choices to be involved or to make decisions for their children's

educational needs. Conversely, Latina mothers "perceived their own agency to be restricted by White power, linguistic barriers, and overt practices of exclusion" (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002, p. 404). Thus, when Latinas made educational decisions for their children, there was a perception of hegemony over these women and their suggestions, questions, and concerns were excluded, ignored, or dismissed.

African American parents in Patillo's (2015) study reported difficulties in the educational milieu. According to Patillo, the key themes of school choice for African Americans were "empowerment, control, and agency" (p. 41). In Patillo's research with 77 poor and working-class African American parents in Chicago, it was determined that the parents were searching for a quality school but faced numerous barriers in admission into the schools of their choice. Patillo noted that the parents were acting as choosers when, in fact, the school was choosing them; thus, the parents were not empowered or in control, and they actually lacked agency as choosers. Moreover, the political context, locations of schools, and systemic racism in school districts disallowed parents to truly be choosers in the educational arena.

In this study, the findings indicated that these women of color were the primary decision makers regarding where their children attended school, even when they had partners in the decision-making process. This finding is similar to those reported by Abrams and Gill (2002) and Patillo (2015). These findings invited reframing of the biased dialogue about parent involvement in schools. The women were unquestionably in agreement that their children would not attend or return to the neighborhood school, or in Rae's case, return to the private school. These findings provide a counternarrative

to the deficit perspectives of women of color as uninvolved or uncaring (Cooper, 2007, 2009; Jasis, 2019).

Cooper's (2005) work concerning African American women and Jasis's (2019) research concerning Latino parents suggested that women of color must engage in the educational process and construct their own school choices and that these women are eager to engage in school choice to improve their children's school experience. The women in Cooper's (2005) study "show[ed] that their positionality, race, class, and gender factors - powerfully influences their educational decision-making" (p. 174). The mothers worked to seek agency (becoming choosers) and to become advocates for their children. Berliner et al. (2014) suggested that parents are true agents of rational economic choice when they choose to leave traditional public schools. Henig (2008) called this a process of choosing a transfer of political power away from the educational systems. Thus, the research is grounded in RCT due to the women making their own decisions from available choices.

Theme 2: Data-Informed Decisions: "I Looked up the School on Google"

In this theme, the findings indicated that the majority of the women of color utilized their network of family and friends in choosing the charter school. Only one of the women acknowledged that she had based her decision on formalized resources, such as information from the TEA. The women relied less on formal and official educational data sources and more on informal sources, such as word of mouth. The women noted that it was easier to obtain information via word of mouth than by any other means.

Six of the eight women acknowledged that they had based their choices on what others had told them about the school. Megan and Penny were the only ones who did not explicitly state that they had received information from formal or informal sources in their choice to enroll in the charter school. Megan stated that she went in search of a school, saw RCA, and stopped in to ask questions. Penny stated that she did not want her daughter in her neighborhood school. The women then told friends and family members about the school, the result of which may have inadvertently led to the disproportionate racial makeup of the charter school. One of the findings in regard to the data in this area was that the women did not know that the racial makeup of the school was similar to national data. At the end of the interviews, when I provided the data concerning the racial demographics of charter schools, all of the women seemed surprised to hear that RCA was majority African American and Latinx.

Just as Camera (2020) suggested, the women of color researched the information, just as White affluent parents have done, and took the initiative to investigate and evaluate the information prior to placing their children in the charter school. Camera (2020) suggested that White affluent parents agreed with integrated schools in theory but, after researching, chose only schools with students of their race and class. Torres and Weissbourd (2020) conducted a survey of 2,600 parents, including Democrats and Republicans, who reported that they determined school quality by how many other White advantaged students attended the school. This information was obviously different from what was occurring at RCA. However, just as occurred at RCA, participants in that

study had chosen academic quality as the most important feature of the school (Torres & Weissbourd, 2020).

This information led to the question of whether Black and Latino women seek information before making decisions on education for their children. The answer was that, regardless of race, people utilize word of mouth as a resource in choosing their children's school (Cooper, 2005; Torres & Weissbourd, 2020). Cooper (2005), in her research with low-income African American women, postulated that the women were in "positioned choice" (p. 174), referring to the social location or position in relation to others when race, class, and gender are taken into account. "A person's positionality relates to the extent to which they are privileged, resourceful, powerful, and thus able to navigate and succeed within the dominant social structure" (Cooper, 2005, p. 175). This positionality includes information and educational options that are available to women of color, who, much as do many other women, utilize available information in making choices. The choices also depend on social capital (Noguera, 2001) and available financial resources (Cooper, 2005). De Gaetano (2007) suggested that Latino parents are often marginalized due to race, class, and culture differences but want the same thing for their children: a fair and equitable education.

Torres and Weissbourd (2020) suggested that White affluent parents believe that it is expected for Black and Latinx families to send their children to schools where they are the minority but not okay for Whites to be the minority in a school setting. Torres and Weissbourd recommended that White parents step outside of their social bubbles (i.e., their small circle of friends) and talk to teachers and principals and visit the

schools, rather than rely exclusively on their small circle of friends for information. M.

Schneider and Buckley (2002) completed a research project based on parental

preferences via Internet searches rather than what parents stated in telephone interviews.

The parental preferences were revealed through information search patterns and studied

and compared to what parents did versus what they said. The finding was that parents

discussed issues of equitable schooling but parents with higher incomes and higher

levels of education actually exercised choices and gathered more information than those

on the opposite end of the spectrum (lower incomes and lower levels of education). This

"unfettered choice may lead to undesirable outcomes in the distribution of students, and

it also may lead to reduced pressure on schools to improve academic performance" (p.

133). The outcome is abundantly clear that these methods lead to segregation of students

(Ritter et al., 2010; Rotberg, 2014; Stein, 2015; Trujillo, 2014). Researchers are left to

wonder, as Sunstein (2004) asked, did *Brown* matter?

These women of color stated that they "liked" the way the school made them and

their children feel. This information corresponds with M. Schneider and Buckley's

(2002) research concerning parental preference, in which they postulated that, given a

choice, parents would select schools on the educational information or make their

choices based on noneducational decisions. As early as 1992, the Carnegie Foundation

for the Advancement of Teaching (1992) reported that parents based their decisions on

factors that had nothing to do with the quality of education. Asher et al. (1996) suggested

that "few parents of any social class appear willing to acquire the information necessary

to make active and informed educational choices" (pp. 40-41) but those with lower

incomes often make the most ill-informed choices (M. Schneider & Buckley, 2002).

This information becomes even more compelling in the discussion of Theme 3 findings.

**Theme 3: The Hopeful Alternative: "I Knew He Wasn't Going Back to *That*
School"**

The third theme focuses on the participants' concerns with school zoning and the

fact that they were permitted to attend only the school in their neighborhood. This

zoning was unacceptable for many of the women, who knew that they did not want their

child to attend "that school." For at least two of the women, this meant moving to

another neighborhood; for all of them, it meant going in search of something that they

felt was missing in the current public educational system. In this situation, the

participants were constrained by the geographic location of their neighborhood school.

Once the women determined that (a) the charter school did not have man-made

school zones, (b) the charter was considered a free and appropriate education with open

enrollment, (c) the school was not based on a religious ideology, and (d) uniforms were

required, the women whole-heartedly embraced enrolling their children in RCA.

The need for a free and appropriate education was driven by the fact that these

women openly stated that they could not afford the cost of educating their children, so

they spoke of being relieved upon learning that RCA was free. Idalia recalled receiving

postcards and flyers with pictures of the students in uniform; not inquiring further, she

concluded that RCA was a Catholic school. Megan stated that, when she found out that

there was no cost to attend, she immediately withdrew her son from public school to

attend RCA. These incidents solidified decisions not to return to "*that* school." But what

if neighborhood schools were inherently equal, regardless of income and race? Research has shown that this is not the case (Casey & Levesque, 2018; Kaplan, 2018; Ravitch, 2013; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2018).

Casey and Levesque (2018) of the Brookings Institute completed a report on the systemic differences in public schools by neighborhoods and identified a correlation with income and race. According to Casey and Levesque's (2018) survey of 3,453 U.S. adults of all races, 64% of African Americans and 45% of Latinx agreed that children in their racial or ethnic group did not have the same opportunities for education as White children. Only 11% of Latinx and 31% of African Americans reported that the quality of public schools was worse in their community, compared to only 17% of Whites. This is consistent with findings that suggest that schools in majority racial neighborhoods are segregated by race and that high-income neighborhoods are more likely to be majority White.

Planned charter school locations have come under fire as charter schools have been located primarily in urban areas, which has resulted in siphoning students to attend traditional public schools in the same locations (West et al., 2018). Therefore, some researchers have suggested that *de facto* segregation has thrived and that schools are more segregated than at the time of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to abolish the doctrine of separate but equal (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2018). Kaplan (2018), in her article "School Choice Is the Enemy of Justice," posited that Whites do not fight the charter school model because it is simply racial avoidance, entirely neutral, and, with all things considered, simply another choice.

Kaplan contended that states and districts have engaged in White flight, forsaken educational equality, and abandoned integration as a method of school reform. Thus, if parents of color choose charter schools, that is their choice and their responsibility. Gill (2020) countered that charter schools tend to be located in low-income high-minority neighborhoods where there are few White students but agreed that the schools are segregated by race and that there is a geographical separation.

Race-Based Rankings

Several of the women of color in this study stated that they would not return to their neighborhood school for several reasons. Although their reasons differed, six women stated that they had been actively looking for another school when they found RCA. Rae chose not to return to the private school, where she considered that her children were frequently on the receiving end of unfair and punitive disciplinary actions. Even though her children were the only two children of color in the classes, she listed race as the least important factor in her decision and academics as the most important. Megan chose not to return her son to the public school due to what she considered to be severe testing anxiety. She listed education as most important factor in her decision and race second to last, with discipline last, even as she stated that her son had not had any discipline issues at RCA or in the traditional public school. Idalia chose RCA for all three of her children due to the eldest child having been bullied and the school's failure to react. Again, education was listed as her first consideration and race was listed as least important. Lydia stated that she knew she would not return to the public school after the school had lost her child; however, she ranked safety third in importance in her decision,

with education and discipline first and second, respectively. Sylvia insisted that she had

moved and looked for another school after her daughter had problems in PK, but she

listed education and school safety as her top two factors in her decision.

None of the women ranked race as the foremost deciding factor in their decisions

to enroll in RCA. All of the women mentioned education or academics as their top

reasons for choosing RCA. As shown in Table 6, race was ranked last by six of the eight

women. Further, none cited race as a catalyst for choosing RCA, regardless of the

problems or circumstances at the traditional public school. This leads to the question of

whether academics at the charter school were different from academics in the zoned

public school.

Traditional Public Schools and RCA Ratings

In this section, I compare the zoned traditional public school academics with

RCA academics to determine whether there is a difference in academic performance, as

some researchers have proclaimed. I identified the public or private schools that the

children would have attended, based on the parents' address. The eight women had a

total of 10 children attending RCA at the time of the study. Based on their addresses,

these ten children would have been assigned to attend four traditional public schools in

the city. I compared two school years of academic data, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, to

determine whether there was a difference in academics based on the following

comparisons: Overall Rating, Student Achievement, STAAR Performance, School

Progress, Academic Growth, Closing the Gaps, and Distinction Designations. Districts

can receive seven distinctions in the areas of Science, Social Studies, Mathematics, Top

25% in Academic Growth, Top 25% Comparative Closing the Gaps, English Language Arts/Reading, and Postsecondary Readiness. In 2017-2018, under House Bill (HB) 22, the state accountability rating established three domains to evaluate academic performance for open-enrollment charter schools, campuses, and districts (TEA, 2018b): Student Achievement, School Progress, and Closing the Gaps. Campuses also receive a rating of Met Standard, Met Alternative Standard, or Improvement Required in each domain. In August 2018, campuses began to receive ratings of A, B, C, D, or F for overall performance (TEA, 2019). According to TEA's Comprehensive Biennial Report on Texas Public Schools (2020),

> Student Achievement evaluates performance across all subjects for all students, on both general and alternate tests. School Progress measures campus and districts outcomes in two areas: the number of students that grow at least one year academically as measured by the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), which is the state's student testing program, and the achievement of all students relative to districts or campuses with similarly economically disadvantaged percentages. Closing the Gaps uses disaggregated data to demonstrate differentials among racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic backgrounds and other factors. The indicators in this domain, as well as the domain's construction, align with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). (p. 3)

For the 2017-2018 school year, RCA had the second-lowest overall rating, 70, behind school B with 69. RCA did not earn any distinctions in the 2017-2018 school

year. Prior to 2013's accountability system, campuses had four ratings: Exemplary, Recognized, Academically Acceptable, and Academically Unacceptable. In 2013, the accountability system changed to two categories: Met Standard and Improvement Required. Based on this system, although RCA Met Standard, the overall rating was not as good as that of the other elementary schools in the district. RCA's ratings and School D's ratings were almost the same, at the bottom. According to TEA (2018b), of the 8,759 campuses in Texas, 7,824 (89.3%) Met Standards, 339 (3.9%) were rated Improvement Required, 86 (1.0%) were labeled Not Rated due to Hurricane Harvey, and the remaining 510 (5.8%) were labeled Not Rated. Comparatively, TEA (2018a) specified that, of the 705 open-enrollment charter schools, such as RCA, 558 (79.1%) Met Standard, 56 (7.9%) were rated Improvement Required, 11 were Not Rated under the Hurricane Harvey provision, and 80 were labeled Not Rated.

The schools that were reviewed are listed as School A through School D. Table 7 shows information for the 2017-2018 school year and Table 8 shows information for the 2018-2019 school year for RCA and the public schools. All of the traditional public schools are in the same school district.

The A–F ratings were applied to campuses at the end of the 2018-2019 school year (TEA, 2018a). As shown in Table 8, at the end of the 2018-2019 school year, RCA received a rating of C Overall, a rating of 67 (D) in Student Achievement, 72 (C) in School Progress, 62 (D) in Academic Growth, and 68 (D) in Closing the Gaps. For both 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, RCA did not earn any Designated Distinctions.

Table 7

2017-2018 School Comparison

School	Overall Rating	Student Achievement	Performance	School Progress	Academic Growth	Closing the Gaps	Designated Distinctions
RCA	70 Met	67 Met	67	70 Met	60 Met	69 Met	Not Earned
A	75 Met	67 Met	67	75 Met	69 Met	74 Met	Not Earned
B	69 Met	62 Met	62	70 Met	70 Met	68 Met	Not Earned
C	82 Met	76 Met	76	84 Met	70 Met	76 Met	3
D	77 Met	69 Met	69	77 Met	77 Met	77 Met	2

Note. School C earned three Distinction Designations: Mathematics, Comparative Academic Growth, and Comparative Closing the Gaps. School D earned two Distinction Designations: English Language Arts/Reading and Mathematics.

Table 8

2018-2019 School Comparison

School	Overall Rating	Student Achievement	STAAR Performance	School Progress	Academic Growth	Closing the Gaps	Designated Distinctions
RCA	71 C	67 D	67	72 C	62 D	68 D	Not earned
A	78 C	70 C	70	79 C	70 C	74 C	Mathematics
B	85 B	74 C	74	88 B	88 B	79 C	3
C	82 B	77 C	77	85 B	60 D	74 C	Mathematics
D	83 B	77 C	77	86 B	59 F	76 C	2

Note. School B earned three Distinction Designations: Mathematics, Comparative Academic Growth, and Comparative Closing the Gaps. School D earned two Distinction Designations: Mathematics and Postsecondary Readiness. STAAR = State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness.

All of the neighborhood schools received Designated Distinctions. Based on the 2-year comparison data, RCA's scores placed it at the bottom of all of the schools that the students would have attend had they remained in their zoned neighborhood schools. The findings indicate that RCA's ratings have fallen in recent years and that the school was not performing academically as well as the neighborhood schools that the women of color had left in search of a better school. This finding is in line with research reported by Barrows et al. (2017) from a national survey concerning parents' perceptions of their schools. The researchers found that charter school parents were more satisfied with their child's schools in areas such as teacher quality, school discipline, and character education. According to the report, when compared with traditional districts, charter school parents were less likely to identify serious problems in their children's schools.

Schneider and Buckley (2006) reported similar findings concerning research on schools in Washington, DC, which showed that charter school parents gave higher ratings to the charter schools than did traditional public school parents. Overall, the increase in segregation in charter schools may suggest that racial disparities in school quality exist along with educational equity (Davis & Welcher, 2013), even when parents are satisfied with their school choice (Schneider & Buckley, 2016). Schneider and Buckley (2006) posited that charter school expansion and reform are contentious policy areas, particularly when parents' preferences affect the socioeconomics and racial compositions of schools. Schneider and Buckley (2006) suggested that, with the majority of students of color "out of the way" in charter schools, traditional public schools are released from focusing on improving academic performance.

These academic findings are in agreement with reports by researchers who have studied charter schools and have determined that many charter schools are not performing as well as public schools (e.g., Berliner et al., 2014; Bilfulco & Ladd, 2007; Ravitch, 2010; 2013; Russakoff, 2015; M. Schneider & DeVeaux, 2010; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2016; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2011). Berliner et al. (2014) and Ravitch (2013) contended that the information on educational excellence in charter schools is, and has been, a hoax, a myth, and a compilation of downright lies. According to Henig (2008), Berliner et al. (2014), and Vasquez Heilig et al. (2016), charter schools have put forth information that suggests that they are better and offer more than traditional public schools but in actuality have threatened the very foundation of public schools (Ravitch, 2013). Silvernail and Johnson (2014), in their empirical evidence-based research of charter schools, determined that charter schools have shown positive, negative, or no effects on academic achievement by students but confirmed that charter schools in urban areas tend to serve more disadvantaged and minority students.

Regardless of the research on segregation, racism, (in)equality, or market-based schools, the women of color in this study chose the charter school for personal reasons. They chose education, safety, location, discipline, and class size as their top considerations, with education first or second over all. This finding is similar to results of the Barrows et al. (2017) survey of 1,571 respondents with school-age children (5 to 18 years) living at home. The respondents had children in public schools, private schools, and charter schools. The parents were asked whether they were satisfied in the areas of teacher quality, discipline, expectations for achievement, safety, and instruction

in character and values, as well as ethnic and racial diversity, facilities, and location. Charter school parents are more satisfied with their schools than were traditional public school parents, with no significant variation regarding location and racial and ethnic diversity among the students. In this research, race and location were also determined not to be issues. Perhaps location is not a factor due to parents' willingness to drive their children to the charter school and their choosing to opt out of neighborhood schools. In essence, students in charter schools and public schools in urban areas are majority Black and Latinx, while students in private schools in suburban areas are predominately White (Barrows et al., 2017). Therefore, the women in this research seemed to be making the best decision based on free available information via word of mouth.

Implications and Recommendations

Given the limited literature regarding reasons women of color are leaving or not enrolling in traditional public schools, this study's findings provide implications for educators, including principals, teachers, and school staff, along with policyholders and women of color.

Implications for Educators, Principals, Teachers, and School Staff

The significance of this study may reside in the potential to influence stakeholders in traditional public schools to hear what women of color have to say about opting out of the traditional education system. Schools must consider what the women identified as issues facing the schools, specifically with zoning of school districts, fewer educational opportunities in low-income areas, and the lack of perceived caring for their children.

Some of the women (Lydia, Idalia, and Amelia) reported that they "liked" how the charter school made them feel. How parents feel is important and has implications for all educators, particularly for principals, teachers, and school staff. Several of the women said that they were welcomed and that their child was comfortable in visiting RCA. Regardless of whether or not this is a well-used recruiting ploy, the women perceived that felt different than they had felt about their zoned campus. Idalia stated that, after her visit, she immediately unenrolled her three children from their school and enrolled them in RCA. For the two parents who had students who were finishing their last year at RCA (Idalia and Megan), neither wanted their child to attend the traditional school. Rae stated that she would not place her children in the traditional public education system. Thus, schools must pay attention to how parents feel about the neighborhood school system and recruit parents to enroll, stay, or at the very least keep up with their children while they are in their care. For these women, while academics may have truly been the most important factor in their decisions, what was most important was how their children were treated and how they were made to feel.

When charter schools distribute their promotional brochures and cards, they typically tout areas such as competition in testing, smaller class sizes, unique program offerings, project-based learning, the most modern technology, and personal computers as reasons to choose charter schools. Local education agencies and school districts might consider sending welcoming information to incoming students at the pre-kindergarten level and each year thereafter to inform families about what their schools have to offer in their own neighborhoods. Since women of color seemed to be the primary decision

maker in this study, the local education agencies and traditional school districts should consider requiring exit interviews, especially with parents of students of color, who are often in the majority in leaving the traditional public school systems for charter schools.

Implications for Policy Makers

I began this dissertation prior to two large-scale transformations in society. One was the highly infectious Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the second was the 2020 presidential election. COVID-19 quickly spread from Wuhan, China, in March 2020 and circled the world, quickly shuttering schools and businesses. Schools reopened only due to the state and federal threats to withhold finances. For the first time in memory, students had a choice of attending school in person or via virtual learning. RCA (and many other schools) have struggled to remain open as students and teachers have tested positive for COVID-19. For example, Rae's entire family was quarantined for 14 days during the Thanksgiving holiday due to one of the children's teachers testing positive for the virus. Parents have taken on the role of the schools in educating their children, which is another obstacle to educational attainment, particularly when the parents themselves have limited education. The school shutdown has significantly affected learning, especially for students of color. When the pandemic is eventually contained, local, state, and federal governments must work to close the ever-widening achievement gap through summer enrichment courses and afterschool programs that specifically target reading, writing, science, and mathematics.

The second adjustment in society occurred with the presidential election and the change from a Republican (Donald J. Trump) to a Democrat (Joseph R. Biden) leader.

Charter schools openings had increased under former Democrat President Barack Obama's administration. Outgoing Republican President Trump and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos were also staunch allies of charter schools and poured money into the charter school system. The significance of this change remains to be seen, as both Republicans and Democrats have favored charter schools in recent years. Certainly, both parties must work together to educate all of America's children, particularly since education has been deemed the new civil rights issue by political demagogues on both sides of the aisle. President Biden's selection of Dr. Miguel Cardona as head of the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) was the first Secretary in the DOE's 42-year history with a background in education, having been a teacher, a national award-winning principal, and a school commissioner in Connecticut. Cardona, in his role as Connecticut's Commissioner of Education, authorized charters, did not close any of the 25 Connecticut charter schools, and renewed all charters during his tenure. Cardona seems to support charter schools as a viable choice but has also supported neighborhood schools. The task for Cardona, and the nation, is to ensure an equitable system that produces an efficient school system and that truly unites children of all races, classes, and cultures. Only then will there be a truly educated system and society.

Charter schools must open themselves to outside researchers to investigate reported issues, such as dropout rates, increased suspension rates, and a lack of higher graduation rates for Black and Latinx students in charter schools. One of the most important issues is that of passing rates for students based on the same standards as those applied to traditional public schools. If charter schools continue to receive failing grades,

such as in Louisiana's schools, where the majority of charter schools have received a D or F rating, then the state and federal governments must step in and provide sanctions for these schools, including a shorter time line of reorganization and closure. All of these areas will have an impact on the future of all students. Students who are most affected are the brown and Black students who chose the charter schools for a chance at education. Then again, perhaps this is part of the plan of noneducation for melanated students.

A final policy implication concerns school zones. Neighborhood school zones are man-made decisions. They are barriers to keep some out and others in. The mandated school zones have resulted in parents having no choice about where they could send their children or parents who are forced to lie to use free and public educational resources. Man-made barriers include access and opportunities to bus transportation to other schools. However, every woman in this study reported that she provided transportation to and from school for her children. The leadership changes at the focus of power in America prompt the question, What if parents were allowed entrance to any school so long as there was room and the parents provided transportation?

Implications for Women of Color

The women of color in this study were predominantly the decision makers for their child's education. The majority reported that they had relied on word of mouth in making educational decisions. This makes sense when choosing a restaurant or a car. However, women of color must apply due diligence in checking out a school, including looking at reports from other entities, such as TEA, state agencies, and neighborhood

and community report cards. These places have a wealth of information regarding not only the academics of the schools but other information that would prove useful in the comparison of schools, including dropout and graduation rates. These reports typically have less bias than "googling" charter school websites. Women of color, as choice makers, must look more closely at academics in charter schools.

Women of color must investigate more than the glossy school website and examine more than the beautiful flyers when making such weighty decisions concerning their children's education. Although there has been, and still will be, a growing number of parents, political discourse, and corporate support of charters, the question remains whether charter schools are equitably educating African American and Latinx children, even as they continue to dominate the charter school systems nationwide. The evidence suggests that choice is present but accurate knowledge is missing, and charter schools have become more segregated due to parental choices.

Researcher's Positionality and Update

After comparing the academic data for RCA and the neighborhood schools, I reached out to seven of the eight women for a follow-up conversation to see whether anything had changed with regard to their enrollment at RCA and to discuss the results and implications of the academic information, especially since academics was at the top of their lists of important factors in making these decisions. Only one participant responded to the request. Rae reported that four of her and her husband's children were currently enrolled in the charter school. The reason for the change: the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting school closures in March 2020. Rae explained that, with the

closure of the schools and being required to become both mother and educator at home, it was difficult to obtain assignments for four children enrolled in three schools. After viewing the school academic ratings, Rae was eager to discuss her viewpoint. She attributed the failing results to five areas: (a) high teacher turnover; (b) "replacement teachers" who spoke English as a second language, making it difficult for the students to understand them; (c) family members of administrators (e.g., the principal's wife, sister-in-law, and brother-in-law, all Turkish) teaching at RCA; (d) noncertified teachers teaching classes; and (e) lack of teacher training on educational platforms, such as Zoom. To add to the recent issues, there have been repeated school closures due to teachers and students testing positive for COVID. Even with this information, Rae is concerned about re-enrolling her children in neighborhood schools based on where they would go and what the educational choices would mean for them in the next school year. Rae stated that she is simply not sure what she will do for the next school year.

I came to this work due to my granddaughter's situation and what was deemed to be limited opportunities in the education system. As an educator with 15 years of experience working in the traditional public school system, I see myriad opportunities for improvement in both the traditional public school system and the charter school system. This research is not an indictment of either system. This research connects women of color with choices that were made in a system that they did not design but are forced to use. The public education system purports to offer free and appropriate education for all students in a democratic society. However, the system erects and

promotes barriers to obtaining this education, such as zoning, busing (or lack thereof), and resegregation of neighborhood schools. This is the travesty in and of itself.

Future Research

One of the unexpected findings of this research was that the participants were unaware of the racial makeup of the school, which was a majority of Black and Latinx students. Another unexpected finding was that the participants almost exclusively relied on word of mouth to assist in their decision-making process. Therefore, I recommend that future researchers investigate the role of social relationships in determining school choice, as the findings from those studies could inform traditional public schools about programs and policies that could assist in maintaining minority students in traditional public schools.

This study focused on women of color as they navigated the school choice process and sought charter schools for their children's education in Texas. Future studies could investigate this population's experiences and choices in other states and school districts. Researchers could conduct comparative studies of the choices and experiences of other races, such as Asians, Native Americans, and bi-racial families, especially since the state's demographics tend to count as the majority three races—White, Black, and Hispanic—while everyone else is considered Other. A comparative study could be conducted with the Asian population, which has nearly quadrupled in size in some counties in Texas in recent years, to determine their choices in the education market place. It is important for future studies to use various methodologies to understand the school choice process through various lenses. A comparative study in which men are the

primary decision makers for the education of their children would be of benefit to understand the influences of males on the educational system. Future researchers could compare educational policies and changes related to charter schools under the three most recent Presidential administrations.

Conclusion

Charter schools are independently operated public schools that provide a tuition-free education but are subject to federal and state laws. They must serve students of all backgrounds and educational needs. Charter schools can be chartered and operated by a government agency, a nonprofit or for-profit organization, or a university. Research has shown that women of color are likely to enroll their children in market-based charter school systems across the nation. Their reasons for choosing charter schools vary, but their positionality, including their race, class, and gender, certainly influences their education decisions. All of the women of color in this study stressed a desire for their children to attain a quality education in the charter school setting. The opportunities to cross district and zoning lines can be a powerful attraction for those who desire a fair and equitable education for their children and for those who seek educational access. These women entered the education marketplace, based on supply and demand, wherein consumer choice determines the continued existence of the product or service. Thus, these women of color made their own decisions based on available information and their own positionality. Regardless of whether the women were married or single, all made what they considered to be the best choice for the educational needs of their children. Their experiences show the importance of options in the educational process of

obtaining educational opportunities where few opportunities were available as they navigated the school choice arena in seeking a charter school for their children's education. Options matter, choice matters, and women's voices matter!

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APPENDIX A

CHARTER MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION (CMO) NONPROFIT

CHARTER SCHOOLS

I plan to interview three to six women of color from two to three charter schools in the state of Texas. All of the schools are listed as CMOs (nonprofit). (See Appendix A)

School A has schools in Austin, Beaumont, Brownsville, Bryan - College Station, El Paso, Ft. Worth, Houston, Laredo, Lubbock, San Antonio and Waco.

School B has one school in Bryan and two additional campuses in Houston.

School C is part of two schools in Houston and one in Bryan-College Station area.

Data is from the Texas Education Agency, 2011-12, Academic Excellence Indicator System, and from the local school district in one city.

	School A	School B	School C	District
# of students	326	91	76	
Grade Levels	K-12	Prek-8th Grade	5, 6, 7, 8	
African American Students n (%)	41 (12.6%)	27 (29.7%)	22 (28.9%)	
Hispanic Students n (%)	170 (52.1%)	50 (54.9%)	49 (64.5%)	
White Students n (%)	97 (29.8%)	12 (13.2%)	3 (3.9%)	
Other races n (%)	3 (0.9%) American Indian 10 (3.1%) Asian 5 (1.5%) Two or More Races	1 (1.1%) American Indian 1 (1.1%) Two or More Races	2 (2.6%) Two or More races	
Economically Disadvantaged	221 (67.8%)	80 (87.9%)	129 (80.3%)	
LEP	57 (17.5%)	0%	0%	
At Risk	103 (31.6%)	47 (51.6%)	41 (26.1%)	

APPENDIX B

TEA INFORMATION ON CHARTER SCHOOLS

A charter school is a type of public school. The Texas Legislature authorized the establishment of charter schools in 1995. Some of the first charters have been in operation since Fall 1996.

There are four types of charters in Texas:
1. Subchapter B Home-rule School District Charters - There are no home-rule school district charters in Texas.
2. Subchapter C Campus or Campus Program Charters - Independent school districts authorize and oversee these charters.
3. Subchapter D Open-enrollment Charters - Most charters in Texas fall under this category. The commissioner authorizes these charters. Before SB 2 passed in 2013, the State Board of Education (SBOE) was the authorizer.
4. Subchapter E University or Junior College Charters - The commissioner authorizes Subchapter E charters. Eligible entities include public colleges and universities.
Charter schools are subject to fewer state laws than other public schools. The reduced legislation encourages more innovation and allows more flexibility, though state law does require fiscal and academic accountability from charter schools. The state monitors and accredits charter schools just as the state accredits school districts.

Mission
Our mission is to cultivate innovative, high-quality learning opportunities and to empower the charter community through leadership, guidance, and support.

Charter School Admissions and Enrollment
The term "open enrollment" means any student can apply to the charter school. The school's charter will specify any exceptions. Discrimination is prohibited in the admissions policy for all charter schools. In most cases, the admissions policy must also describe a lottery process. A charter must use a lottery process when the number of applications to the school exceeds the number of available spaces.

The school may only ask for basic information such as name, age, and address during the application process. Once a student is admitted and has registered and enrolled, the enrollment process begins. It is only then that the school may request information about past academic achievement, medical history, etc.
See also Charter Admission Enrollment Withdrawal 2016-2017 for more information..

Withdrawal from a Charter School
Parents may withdraw their children from a charter school at any time. A charter school may not remove or expel a student for failure to progress in the program. The only time a charter may expel a student is if the student commits an expellable offense. The student code of conduct should list these types of offenses. The expulsion may only happen after due process has occurred. The charter holder board must determine that the expulsion is appropriate.

See also Charter Admission Enrollment Withdrawal 2016-2017 for more information.

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR PARENTS

Dear Parent(s),

As a doctoral student at Texas A&M University, I am completing research on parental choice of parents of school age children in Texas. I am asking for your participation in an interview regarding my research into understanding why parents, specifically women of color, have chosen to place their children in charter schools as their school of choice. Given the availability of parents and the size of the parent group, your participation is critical to the success of this research. Although there are questions about your perceptions pertaining to school choice, this information will not be shared with anyone. The information from these interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for the research purposes stated above.

The Department of Educational And Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University 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 tie. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with the charter school, the services provided to you, or Texas A&M University.

Your willingness to participate in an interview lasting approximately thirty minutes to one hour is critical for this research. There are absolutely no right or wrong answers to the questions, and your insight will be greatly appreciated. Your involvement is strictly voluntary, and whether you choose to participate or not will in no way affect your relationship with the charter school you have chosen for your child or children.

We do not anticipate any risks associated with your participation in this study. The information you share will be treated confidentially, and every effort will be made to protect your individual identity. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university police, or (b) you give written permission. Your name will not be associated with any research reports or publications unless you give prior approval.

Your participation in this research study does require audio recording of the interview. With your permission, we would like to audio record the interview so that it can be transcribed and analyzed by me at a later date. If at any time you wish the recorder to be turned off, we will do so. No one else will have access to the recorded interviews. All data collected during this study will be kept in my secure, password protected computer and in a locked file storage in my office. The recorded data will be destroyed within 30 days after completion of the research study.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. We believe this study will be of interest to other charter schools and charter sponsoring agencies.

If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at donna.druery@tamu.edu or call me at 979-775-4264. You may also contact my dissertation chairs at Texas A&M University, Dr. Gwen Webb-Hasan at gwebbj@tamu.edu or Dr. Mario Torres at mstorres@tamu.edu.

Sincerely,

Donna M. Druery, B.A., M.Ed.
Texas A&M University

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.

_____
Print Participant's Name

_____ _____
Participant's Signature Date

SURVEY OF PARENTAL INTEREST

My name is Donna Druery and I am conducting research on women of color who choose charter schools for their children's education.

Ø Are you the parent of child(ren) attending a charter school?
      Yes _____ No _____

Ø If you are not the parent, what is your relationship to the child attending charter school?

Grandmother_____ Aunt _____ Guardian _____ Friend _____

Ø What grade is the child in charter school?

Kindergarten_____ First____ Second____ Third_____ Fourth_____ Fifth_____

Ø How long has the child attended charter school?

First year _____ Two to three years _____ Four to five years _____

Ø How does your child get to school?

Bus_____ Car_____ Walk _____Other (Ex: friend, neighbor, relative) _____

Ø Which race would you self-select?

African American/Black _____ Latino _____ Biracial (Please list races) _____

Would you consider participating in a longer interview in person or by phone?

Yes _____ No_____

Your Phone number: _____

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL PARENT(S)

1. Please state your name and address.
2. Tell us about yourself and your family? (marital status, siblings, educational status)
3. How do you identify as your race/ethnic group?
4. How many children do you care for total?
5. How many children attending Charter school?
6. Ages and Grades of children
7. Type of Transportation – Bus ____ Car_____ Other_____
8. Do you have a public school in your neighborhood?
9. If yes, how close in miles/blocks?
10. What reasons did you choose to not enroll your child in the neighborhood school?
11. Why did you choose this particular Charter School?
12. How did you find out about this charter School?
13. What did you hear or know about this school before you enrolled in this charter school?
14. Have your child/children attended/been enrolled in other charter schools?
15. How important are test scores in your choosing charter schools?
16. Did you consider the school's academic report when considering this charter school?
17. How important is the discipline in your choosing this charter school?
18. Did you consider discipline in your choosing this charter school?
19. Was race or ethnic group a decision in your choosing this charter school?
20. Did you consider race or ethnic groups in your choosing this charter school?
21. Was language or a language program a factor in choosing this charter school?
22. How important was class size in choosing this charter school?
23. How important was your concern for school safety?
24. How important was the location of the school?
25. How important was it to choose a place where your child had friends?
26. Does the school reputation matter in your decision? (e.g.., Harmony or Brazos School for Creativity? = another model of CS.
27. What do you value most in choosing a school?
28. Overall, what do you consider as the most important reason you chose this charter school?
29. Is there anything else you would like to add?