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Open Competition or Balkanized Coexistence? The Effects of Market Segments on Toronto Private Schools

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Abstract: For over 25 years, school choice advocates have argued that market competition drives educational organizations to become more differentiated and technically-oriented. However, empirical research has only partially supported this view, observing such outcomes only under certain conditions. To better understand the contingent nature of market effects within education, we draw on sociological and organizational theories that emphasize the ‘embeddedness’ of economic behavior. We test this idea using data from all private schools in Toronto, Canada, a strategic setting that approximates a ‘pure’ market by being mostly free of public governance. We find that, net of factors like school size and age, market segment is associated with the presence of a variety of organizational features. In conclusion,

we ponder ways that institutional norms and community ties not only buffer schools from market forces, but also, infuse consumer preferences.

Keywords: private schools; economic sociology; markets; Toronto

¿La competencia abierta o coexistencia balcanizada? Los efectos de los segmentos de mercado en las escuelas privadas de Toronto

Resumen: Durante más de 25 años, defensores de la opción escolar han argumentado que la competencia del mercado impulsa a las organizaciones educativas a ser más diferenciadas y técnicamente orientadas. Sin embargo, la investigación empírica sólo ha apoyado parcialmente esta opinión, observando tales resultados sólo bajo ciertas condiciones. Para entender mejor la naturaleza contingente de los efectos del mercado dentro de la educación, nos basamos en teorías sociológicas y organizacionales que enfatizan la “embeddedness” del comportamiento económico. Probamos esta idea usando datos de todas las escuelas privadas en Toronto, Canadá, un escenario estratégico que se aproxima a un mercado “puro” por estar en su mayoría libre de gobierno público. Encontramos que, aparte de factores como el tamaño de la escuela y la edad, el segmento de mercado se asocia con la presencia de una variedad de características organizacionales. En conclusión, reflexionamos sobre cómo las normas institucionales y los lazos comunitarios no sólo protegen a las escuelas de las fuerzas del mercado, sino también infunden las preferencias de los consumidores.

Palabras-clave: escuelas privadas; sociología económica; mercados; Toronto

Concorrência aberta ou coexistência balcanizada? Os efeitos dos segmentos de mercado nas escolas particulares de Toronto

Resumo: Durante más de 25 años, defensores de la opción escolar han argumentado que la competencia del mercado impulsa a las organizaciones educativas a ser más diferenciadas y técnicamente orientadas. Sin embargo, la investigación empírica sólo ha apoyado parcialmente esta opinión, observando tales resultados sólo bajo ciertas condiciones. Para entender mejor la naturaleza contingente de los efectos del mercado dentro de la educación, nos basamos en teorías sociológicas y organizacionales que enfatizan la “embeddedness” del comportamiento económico. Probamos esta idea usando datos de todas las escuelas privadas en Toronto, Canadá, un escenario estratégico que se aproxima a un mercado “puro” por estar en su mayoría libre de gobierno público. Encontramos que, aparte de factores como el tamaño de la escuela y la edad, el segmento de mercado se asocia con la presencia de una variedad de características organizacionales. En conclusión, reflexionamos sobre cómo las normas institucionales y los lazos comunitarios no sólo protegen a las escuelas de las fuerzas del mercado, sino también infunden las preferencias de los consumidores.

Palavras-chave: escolas particulares; sociologia económica; mercados; Toronto

Introduction: Market Theory on the Organization of Schools

Since the early 1990s, supporters of school choice have made bold claims about the beneficial effects of markets on educational organizations.¹ Generalizing from American Catholic schools, proclaimed by scholars throughout the 1980s to be more efficient (e.g., having lower costs) and

¹ Our review focuses on the impact of choice on school organization, rather than on the voluminous literature on the effects of choice on student performance. For a review of the latter topic, see Berends (2015).

effective (e.g. generating high test scores) than public counterparts (see Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982; Davies & Pizarro Milian, 2013), Chubb and Moe (1990) and others (see Lieberman, 1989, 1993) articulated a set of ideas that would become known as ‘Market Theory.’ This perspective rested on the assumption that market environments indiscriminately rewarded ‘success’ and ‘punished’ failure, selecting out the weakest competitors within a field, and effectively transforming entire organizational populations (see also Smith, 1994, p. 475; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2000, p. 35). Key to such setup was the extension of unfettered choice to parents (e.g. “open enrollment programs), allowing them to select from private and public options across “extensive geographical areas,” and effectively placing each school in direct “competition with every other school for students” (West, 1997, p. 86, 87). Alas, it entailed the erection of a ‘pure’ market for education, akin to those that had previously revolutionized conventional industries (Friedman, 1997). Forcing schools to compete for student-derived revenue would blow a “fresh breeze of innovation” into the education system, forcing the enactment of a series of adaptations in school procedures and structures (Metz, 2003, p. 1; also see Coulson, 1994, 1996, 1999; Friedman, 1962). Market competition would compel schools to become more technically-oriented, driving them to i) cut costs, by dropping wasteful practices, ii) become more performance-driven, focused primarily on improving quantitative metrics, like standardized test scores, and iii) differentiate their curricula and pedagogy to align with consumer demands. These adaptations, devised to attract clients, would have the effect of toppling the ‘one size fits all’ model within the public school system (see Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In doing so, market schemes were hailed as having the potential to reverse strong ‘isomorphic’ processes, or convergence on ‘taken-for-granted’ ways of organizing, within the field of education (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978).

Throughout their relatively short existence, choice reforms have remained a divisive and controversial subject within public discourse (Henig, 2008). Supporters have lauded the rationalization of educational processes at the hands of the market. Meanwhile, detractors have decried the penetration of neoliberal logics into the sacrosanct realm of education, lamenting that the ‘civic’ functions of education are undermined by competition-oriented reforms (Olssen, 2002). Though advancing clearly contradictory assessments of choice reforms and their supposed consequences, both camps perceive neoliberal inspired market reforms to be fundamentally reconfiguring educational organizations, and both see choice schemes as eroding traditions and practices within the field of education. We posit, however, that these supposed effects have not been adequately mapped empirically. When Market Theory was first voiced in the early 1990s, most choice schemes were still in their infancy, and thus had generated little data with which to map market effects. Though some scholars compared Catholic and public schools, they primarily attributed differences in the former to their linked religious communities rather than markets (see Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982). We posit that Market Theory is best tested with data on a range of schools of choice, both religious and non-religious, since this allows one to observe the effects of specific market segments and their communities. Such tests have become feasible in recent years as choice initiatives have gained traction throughout the United States, and have even perforated some Canadian provinces (Bossetti & Gereluk, 2016). Numerous scholars have become interested in different kinds of private schools and other schools of choice, creating a specialist literature on educational markets (see Berends, 2015; Davies & Quirke, 2007; Lubienski, 2003; Lubienski & Lee, 2016). Such work has found that competition does not uniformly shape school structures and practices, but does so only under specific conditions. Indeed, choice schools have been found to remain isomorphic with their traditional public counterparts in fundamental ways. As such, the supposedly ‘radical’ effects of markets on educational organizations, believed to be occurring by both choice advocates and critics, remain largely unsubstantiated.

In light of such emerging literature, we seek to empirically and theoretically understand: How are market forces reconfiguring educational organizations? What accounts for the seemingly contingent nature of market effects found across the literature? Do market segments, and their corresponding communities and norms, mediate the supposed effects of market pressures on educational organizations? We explore these questions empirically by identifying four market segments within the Toronto private school (TPS) sector – Elite, Religious, ‘New’ and International – and testing whether those segments are independent predictors of a host of school traits and actions, net of standard control variables. In particular, we examine differences in population stability (e.g. births/deaths/sanctioning), institutional orientation (e.g. geographical location, physical facility and curriculum type), and status orientations (e.g. tuition costs, affluence of location, advertising of alumni in prestigious schools). Drawing on theorizing from the fields of Organizational and Economic Sociology (Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1985; Meyer & Rowan, 2006), we hypothesize that schools across segments will vary considerably, given that each are embedded within unique communities. This exposes them to different ‘bundles’ of institutionalized norms, such as associating schooling with children’s holistic development, or the linking of conventional school characteristics to prestige, which differentially *buffer* schools from market pressures. Moreover, we theorize that such norms can be perceived as differentially *infusing* consumer demand across communities, and thus, contributing to the balkanization of educational markets. To the extent that conventional school forms are associated with prestige, that unconventional forms are distrusted, or that cost-cutting is associated with ‘cheapness,’ we argue that communal norms serve as ‘filters’ through which consumers evaluate schools, and thus, serve as parameters for inter-school competition.

Robust Findings from Empirical Studies

Empirical studies of choice schools suggest several robust patterns that provide only mixed support for Market Theory. First, boosted competition appears to trigger only a limited amount of differentiation and niche-seeking among schools. While some groupings of private and public schools do appear to have an abundance of curricular specialties (Gaztambide-Fernandez, Nicholls & Arraiz-Matute 2016), others do not (e.g., Davies & Quirke, 2007; Hassel, 1998, 1999; Price, 1999). When innovation does occur among some schools of choice, it seems to be through peripheral ‘add-ons’ rather than ‘core’ changes to traditional structures or classroom practices (Plank & Sykes, 1999). As Adnett & Davies (1999) note, competition tends to drive choice schools to place an “emphasis upon promotional and image enhancing changes, rather than substantive changes in school’s teaching and curriculum” (p. 229). As such, even in the face of increased competition, isomorphism remains across many dimensions of school organization (Berends & Zottola, 2009; Horn & Miron, 2000; Lubienski, Gulosino, & Weitzel, 2009; Lubienski & Lee, 2016; Preston, Goldring, Berends, & Cannata, 2011).

Second, marketized environments appear to push schools to become more technically-oriented in only certain respects. For instance, when faced with revenue shortfalls, private schools will engage in drastic cuts, compromising educational conventions such as libraries, gyms, and certified teachers (Quirke, 2009, 2013). But, when not facing dire conditions, schools of choice, and even private tutoring businesses, tend to retain many ‘institutional’ features that market advocates label as inefficient (Aurini, 2015). In fact, it would be fair to say that a performance orientation among schools is more effectively encouraged through policymaking than markets. Government-led accountability regimes, such as the USA’s No Child Left Behind Act, have driven schools of choice (and public schools) to focus on standardized test scores. Absent of such coercive stimulus, schools’ behavior remains largely unaffected. Established private schools, for instance, largely eschew standardized testing (Davies & Quirke, 2007). Market forces, when left on their own, appear to

channel competition not towards performance orientation, but instead, to practices that are oriented towards customer service, such as small classes, advertising, outreach to parents, and so on (Quirke, 2009, 2013).

Third, schools of choice that are relatively established and financially secure tend to embrace very 'institutional' aspects of education, such as generalist curricula and elaborate physical plants (Gauri, 1998; Lubienski, 2001, 2003). This behavior conforms to broader patterns found across a variety of organizational fields whereby mid-status actors strive to emulate elite peers in order to enhance their own status (Han, 1994; Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001, 2013). Many schools, even in highly marketized environments, seek organizational forms that are associated with status, prestige and exclusivity, rather than student performance per se.

Finally, 'expressive' criteria appear to drive many popular forms of choice, such as religious schools, schools of the arts, and homeschooling. These choices are popular not necessarily for their technical attributes (e.g., low cost, academic benefits), but for their connection to certain non-economic values. Religious schools, for instance, are primarily valued by clients for their faith orientation (Zine, 2006, 2008), though they take very pragmatic approaches to their organization, economizing when needed. Homeschooling similarly appeals to parents with either religious or 'alternative' cultural values (Aurini & Davies, 2005; Davies & Aurini, 2003; Stevens, 2001). Public schools of the arts are also attracting increasing numbers of clients who hold widely varying notions of the value and meaning of art (Gaztambide-Fernandez et al., 2015).

Rationale for this Study

Like others (Berends, 2015), we read this literature as suggesting that school markets do not uniformly trigger the effects proposed by choice advocates, such as increased differentiation and technical orientations, but do so only under certain conditions. In light of such findings, we seek to inquire: Why are market effects seemingly contingent, and under which conditions are they strong or weak? Why might market forces transform only some elements of school organizations, only under certain conditions, and allow schools to remain otherwise unaffected? In this paper, we seek to answer these questions empirically and theoretically. Empirically, we examine all school organizations in a strategic setting: the City of Toronto's private school (TPS) sector. Our setting provides an important test of Market Theory in several ways. First, its broader jurisdiction is very dynamic: the number of private schools in the province of Ontario is continually growing, having doubled from about 500 to just over 1000 over the past 25 years (Davies & Pizarro Milian, 2015). This dynamism has created a varied degree of stability within the private school population: some schools are very established and stable, while others are newer, embroiled in competition, and teeter on the brink of extinction. Second, it hosts a wide variety of school types, from generalist to specialist, from non-profit to for-profit, from tuition-expensive to relatively cheap. Third, Toronto private schools are freer from public governance than are U.S. charter schools, magnet schools and voucher-receiving schools, whose funding depends more readily on meeting criteria set out in charter agreements and related legislation. The TPS does fall short of one ideal held by choice advocates: they do not receive public subsidies and are thus unaffordable to the city's poorest families. Yet, many of these schools, particularly religious ones, instead receive subsidies from community organizations, and can charge relatively low tuition fees that are affordable to large swaths of the city's families. In sum, TPS provides a dynamic and varied school marketplace.

Theoretically, we seek to move beyond Market Theory by incorporating ideas that are attuned to the broader range of social influences on school organizations. Market Theory assumes that educational conventions persist only as market 'imperfections,' remnants of older, pre-market governance that will eventually wither away if exposed to competition (Merrifield, 2001). Yet, studies

show that despite a quarter century of marketization, school organizations, even in competitive settings, continue to bear the imprint of longstanding traditions. Many forms of isomorphism, ‘loose coupling’² and non-technical orientations thrive even under the pressures of market competition. To better theorize these robust empirical patterns, we incorporate three sets of ideas. First, we draw on contemporary New Institutionalism (e.g., Meyer and Rowan, 2006) to understand the persistence of institutional norms in private education. Second, we draw on Economic Sociology (Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1985) to highlight the social underpinnings of market relations in local networks and communities. Third, we hypothesize how combinations of institutional norms and communities create market segments in private education.

Theory I: Persisting Institutional Norms in the Face of Market Forces

New Institutionalism emerged in the 1970s to argue that schools, and organizations more broadly, are subject to sweeping ‘isomorphic’ pressures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978). Through coercive, mimetic and normative channels, organizations were pressured to conform to traditional ways of organizing within their fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This was particularly true in more ‘institutional’ environments, such as education, where performance criteria were ‘nebulous’ or contested. There, organizations were rewarded for appearing legitimate, rather than for their superior technical performance (D’Aunno, Sutton, & Price, 1991). Much has changed since the advent of the New Institutionalism, both within the field of education (Meyer & Rowan, 2006), as well as the organizational literature (Scott, 2008). Within education, the emergence of choice initiatives, growth of private schools, homeschooling, and even for-profit educational enterprises, have greatly expanded the range of educational options. This challenges a primary postulate of the New Institutionalism (‘isomorphism’): that organizational populations converge on ‘taken-for-granted’ models. Further, since the 1970s, many public school jurisdictions have initiated accountability regimes aimed at boosting academic standards, prompting schools to alter their technical cores in response to external monitoring. This has challenged another New Institutional tenet (‘loose coupling’): that school structures are weakly associated with technical exigencies in their local surroundings.

While scholars acknowledge the impacts of choice and accountability schemes on schools, they also note that norms in education are stubbornly durable. As highlighted earlier, schools typically remain isomorphic with peers, are driven by status-seeking and non-instrumental logics. To explain why such norms persist, even in market settings, we draw attention to the ‘embeddedness’ of education within broader societal structures. Among some parents, for example, education is associated with the development of children’s very personhood, and broad goals of cultivating, enriching, and preserving cultures, religions and languages (Falch & Mang, 2015). In addition, even in an era of heightened education competition, many traditional schooling structures and practices are valued for their perceived ‘prestige.’ Economists have noted that school selection, at both K-12 and university levels, is not very cost sensitive. Individuals will pay large fees for educational services if they are seen to have repute (Clotfelter, 1999). Elite private schools for instance, are able to command exorbitant fees (Baker, 2014; Khan, 2010). Conversely, cost-cutting in education is associated with cheapness and low-status (Clotfelter, 1999). Public schooling has also long been perceived by some stakeholders as a societal vehicle for equity, fairness, and equal opportunity. The latter is a narrative that drove the expansion of education throughout the 20th century (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). And, if

² Within the organizational literature, loose coupling is defined as occurring in a variety of scenarios (see Weick, 1976). For example, it is said to exist when i) organizational components (e.g. departments, office) operate in isolation, with little consistency in their norms or culture or ii) organizational performance has little bearing on its survival.

anything, is a sentiment that has gained greater support throughout this period. At a societal level, there is an ever-greater concern that schooling ought to be an ‘equalizing’ force in an increasingly unequal society (e.g., Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Murnane & Duncan, 2011). We posit that normative understandings of schooling such as these have two key consequences. First, they *buffer* schools in market settings from some of the technical and ‘rationalizing’ pressures that markets are said to generate, namely cost-efficiency and test score competition. Second, these norms can actively *shape* consumer demand in school markets. To the degree that conventional school forms are associated with prestige, that unconventional forms are distrusted, or that cost cutting is associated with ‘cheapness’ and lesser quality, institutional norms can actually infuse market processes, becoming bases by which consumers seek schools, and serving as parameters by which schools compete.

Theory II: Embedding Private Education in Communities

The social embeddedness of markets is a foundational idea in Economic Sociology (Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1985; Uzzi, 1996).³ Exchanges and transactions do not occur in a social vacuum; rather, they germinate in social relationships. Strong norms of trust and reciprocity can ‘lubricate’ the extension of credit; while fear of opportunism, deceit and distrust can stifle economic interactions (Uzzi, 1996). Whereas traditional economic theory may be based on the ‘buyer beware’ premise, economic sociologists note that closely-tied market actors will apply social pressures of ‘shame’ to prevent malfeasance in markets (Granovetter, 1985). In sum, economic sociologists emphasize that economic behavior in well-defined communities is not frequently guided by conventional factors like profit-seeking and economic self-interest (Coleman, 1988). This is a logic we believe can be fruitfully extended to the process of school selection, and the broader constitution of educational markets.

It is widely accepted that private schools, for example, have longstanding ties to various communities that have perceived their needs to be un-met by the public school system. Religious groups, for instance, have long sponsored private schools, as evidenced by the lengthy history of Catholic schools in the USA. In Canada, one-half of the 2000 private schools have religious mandates (Allison, Hasan & Van Pelt, 2016). Our Toronto data show over one-quarter of the city’s 286 private schools have a religious orientation. The import of religious communities for Market Theory is that they generate demand for, and supplies of, private schools that, in their organization, routinely defy market logic. Religious schools are mostly non-profit bodies subsidized by religious groups. They prioritize moral education over forms of learning that can be captured by standardized test scores (Zine, 2008). Likewise, across a range of nations, Elite private schools have had strong ties to very different communities. Societal elites have typically sought schooling that can bring them status, prestige and exclusivity (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Khan, 2010; Meadmore & Meadmore, 2004; Maxwell & Maxwell, 1985). They often gravitate toward English-style boarding schools with architectural styles, dress codes and refined interactions that signal luxuriousness and affluence rather than technical performance. While over recent decades elite schools have pursued more robust academics and extra-curricular offerings, to be more socially relevant and educationally competitive, they have done so via lavish spending and the accumulation of large endowments, both of which have the effect of sheltering them from economizing pressures (Gatzimbide-Fernandez, 2009; Khan, 2010). As such, while religious and elite private schools differ greatly along many dimensions, they share a sponsorship from a community. As a result, their structures often defy rationalizing forces that would be otherwise encouraged by market competition.

³ See Rivera, Soderstrom & Uzzi (2010) for a recent review of the embeddedness literature.

Theory III: The Formation of Market Segments

We argue that these linked communities and their corresponding norms combine to create *market segments* within education. Markets are not always openly competitive, with each actor being in direct competition with every other actor. Rather, they are ‘balkanized,’ splintering into distinct groupings of consumers and suppliers by taste, region, or demographics. Whereas classical economic theory portrays firms as subjected to uniform market pressures, along with cost-cutting and performance exigencies, distinct segments and communities can prompt the emergence and continued survival of institutional forms which are neither cost-effective nor efficient. Applying this thinking to education, we reason that any firm embedding of schools of choice across different communities can serve to fragment the educational marketplace, limiting the open competitive environment championed by choice advocates. In private education, for instance, these segments will not be mere ‘wrinkles’ on the surface of otherwise uniform competitive spaces, but will instead signal deep differences among educational “consumers” and “suppliers” in terms of social networks, backgrounds, demographics and philosophies. Further, different community patrons will draw on diverging institutional norms, each refracting market pressures in different ways. For instance, well-connected and affluent patrons can bring stability to a segment, buffering schools against excessive cost-cutting, while incentivizing the adoption of luxurious features, even those that may prove technically inefficient. In contrast, schools in segments that lack such community ties may need to have more technical orientations to survive. Thus, we hypothesize that segments form through different combinations of community ties and institutional norms, and imbue their organizations with distinct identities, mandates, and orientations. Schools compete for students mainly within their segment rather than across the entire market.

Methods and Data

Setting

The TPS sector consists of four main market segments. First, there are “Elite” schools, which we define as members of the Council of Independent Schools (CIS), an exclusive governing body of private schools. Second, there are “Religious” schools comprised mainly of Christian, Jewish and Islamic schools. Third, there are “International” schools that recruit students from abroad, and have mandates to teach English and other languages as part of a preparation for North American universities. Finally, there is the “New Sector”, a segment with a vast array of curricular and pedagogical specialties and philosophies, like Montessori, Waldorf and feminism, specialties like science, arts and sports, and museum-focus schools. As a segment, these schools tend to resemble American charter schools. In many respects, the TPS sector has qualities idealized by Market Theory. It houses a great array of schools with varied philosophies, specialties, sizes, costs, and clientele. It is also minimally regulated by government. While the province of Ontario does require private schools to be accredited by its Ministry of Education, that process requires only that schools enroll at least five students, pass health and safety standards, and demonstrate that they roughly follow the outline of the provincial curriculum. Otherwise, Ontario private schools are free to organize themselves as they please. But, in return for that freedom, Ontario private schools do not receive any tuition subsidies from the public. Many are subsidized by religious and ethnic organizations, but charge tuition according to what the market will bear.

Data Gathering

Our data set contains information on all 286 private schools listed as accredited on the official Ontario Ministry of Education website in 2009 and 2013. We compiled a rich data set by combining

six data sources: the Ontario Ministry of Education, school websites, a private school directory, phone interviews, census data, and web-based visual resources. We gathered the majority of our data⁴ on enrollment sizes and years that schools were initially established directly from the Ontario Ministry of Education. Some institutions failed to report those data to the Ministry, so to reduce missing data, we gathered publicly available information posted on school websites, and examined a local private school directory known as *Our Kids*. If those two steps also failed, we then called representatives from schools for an informational interview.

We also examined and manually coded school websites to record a variety of organizational traits and practices. To examine the organizational stability of each segment, in the summer of 2015 we accessed the official list of private schools accredited by the Ontario Ministry of Education. We recorded whether schools were ‘born’ over the five years between 2010 and 2015, whether they “died” (had closed), and whether they had their credential granting authority revoked⁵ by the Ministry. To examine whether schools complied with institutional conventions, we coded each school as a ‘specialist’ or ‘generalist’ given their curriculum type and target population. We designated specialists to be those providing curriculums with an emphasis on the arts or ballet, for example, or servicing a particular niche such as high school athletes, or mentioned a type of pedagogy like “Montessori.” We also recorded whether or not they advertised their accreditation on their website or other promotional materials. To further examine their institutional traits, we used Google Streetview and Google Earth services to code whether schools were housed in conventional school buildings or in unconventional spaces, such as church basements, houses or shopping plazas. We also coded whether schools were located in traditional residential areas or non-traditional surroundings, like industrial and commercial areas. As an indicator of conformity to institutional norms, we also recorded whether or not schools advertised their accreditation by actors such as the Ministry of Education, or associations like the Ontario Federation of Independent Schools (OFIS). To examine status orientations, we coded promotional efforts to showcase prestigious placements in elite international post-secondary institutions, such as Harvard, Yale or Oxford. We further coded whether schools advertised prestigious curricula such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB Programs). To further examine status orientations, we gathered data on census tracts surrounding each school, including their average dwelling values and average family incomes from the 2011 National Household Survey. Finally, we recorded the average tuition fees for each school by averaging the highest and lowest fees charged by it for yearly enrollments across different grades.⁶

Analytic Approach

Our study aims to detect the effects of market segments on the practices and structures of Toronto private schools. We test for significant differences between segments along three dimensions of school organization: stability, institutional versus technical orientation, and status orientation. This investigation proceeds in two stages. We first compare descriptive statistics for each segment for all

⁴ We acquired enrollment data for the 2010-2013 years, the only available Ministry data at the time of writing, and subsequently used the average of such figures in our analysis.

⁵ The revocation of credential granting authority usually follows a failure to meet Ministry guidelines, as either discovered through inspection or demonstrated by parent complaints.

⁶ Several of our variables have either no missing data or are missing only 5% or less of all cases. Variables with the most missing data are: school size (17% of all cases missing), tuition (25%), prestigious curricula (22%) and prestigious placement (12% missing). Many schools with missing data had closed and dropped out of the population after 2009, making it difficult to find data on tuition fees, for instance. Because these rates of missing data are not overly high, and since some of these variables are dichotomous, we elected to not attempt multiple imputation.

variables, and conduct difference of means/difference of proportions tests between Elite schools versus all others, and Religious schools versus the remaining two segments. Those tests reflect our reasoning that ties to distinctive communities – elites and religious groups – likely shape school characteristics. We then build multivariate models (OLS regression for continuous outcomes and logistic regression for binary outcomes) to test whether segment significantly predicts institutional and status orientations net of several control variables. Controls are important because experience and resources, not segment per se, may shape school structures and practices. Any school that survives selection pressures and avoids an organizational death will likely become stable and acquire a largesse of resources. To determine whether school orientations reflect their position in a segment, or are instead products of acquiring experience and resources, in the second stage we reconceive two of our key organizational variables – size and age – as control variables. The literature has shown that size and age can powerfully predict a host of organization traits (e.g., Scott & Davis, 2013). Moreover, population ecology research has shown these two variables to have strong consequences for organizational survival (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1983). We thus control for these two variables to untangle the effects of organizational size and age with those of segment, since segments likely differ along those variables.

Our multivariate models also include three other control variables. First, we control for whether or not a school is at the elementary level only. Elementary and high-schools operate in different markets and have age-specific mandates, and so, for instance, it is doubtful that elementary schools will engage in practices like advertising the admission of their students into prestigious universities. Second, we control for whether or not a school had a website by the year 2015, using it as a proxy for a basic level of resources. Third, we controlled for whether or not a school had ever changed its name (7% of TPS schools had changed their name at least once). Since schools change their name for several reasons (e.g., new leadership, mandates, or locations) and since name changes can bring some instability to a school in any segment, we controlled for this practice.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 below compares the four segments by sample size, means, standard deviations, and t-test results on all of our variables. Asterisks in the column for the Elite segment denotes whether or not means/proportions for the Elites differ significantly from all other segments combined; the column for the Religious segment denotes whether it differs from the New Sector and International segments combined.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics by Market Segment

	All Segments (<i>n</i> =286)	Elite (<i>n</i> =21)	Religious (<i>n</i> =72)	New Sector (<i>n</i> =145)	International (<i>n</i> =48)
Organization Stability					
School Age (<i>n</i> =270)	25.8 (27.2)	74.8*** (55.8)	27.4** (21.1)	19.5 (16.4)	19.5 (17.6)
School Size (<i>n</i> =238)	172.4 (234.6)	593*** (354.4)	213.8*** (249.5)	91.2 (111.7)	112.2 (107.3)
Recent Births (<i>n</i> =270)	.26 (.44)	0.0**	.15** (.36)	.33 (.47)	.30 (.47)
Recent Deaths	.15 (.36)	0.0*	.15 (.36)	.16 (.37)	.21 (.41)
Revoked Status	.04 (.20)	0.0	.03 (.16)	.06 (.23)	.04 (.20)
Institutional vs Technical Orientation					
Traditional Area	.46 (.50)	.86*** (.36)	.46 (.50)	.43 (.50)	.38 (.49)
Traditional Bldg	.18 (.39)	.90*** (.30)	.22** (.42)	.09 (.29)	.08 (.28)
Advertise Accreditation (<i>n</i> =241)	.51 (.50)	.95*** (.22)	.24*** (.43)	.48 (.50)	.76 (.43)
Specialist Name (<i>n</i> =271)	.28 (.45)	.14 (.36)	.06*** (.24)	.31 (.46)	.60 (.49)
Specialist Curricula (<i>n</i> =154)	.31 (.46)	.24 (.44)	.13** (.34)	.43 (.50)	.23 (.43)
Status Orientation					
Tuition (<i>n</i> =214)	6272 (4204)	12812*** (3199)	4181** (3211)	6095(3983)	5423 (2389)
Income in area (<i>n</i> =280)	127105 (82788)	253584*** (155046)	110376 (55988)	123750 (72276)	105360 (46022)
Land Value (<i>n</i> =282)	602138 (315627)	1072140*** (486358)	571258 (291727)	578837 (268208)	509520 (204112)
Pop Density of Area (<i>n</i> =284)	6132 (6757)	4236 (3575)	4465** (3332)	6853 (73256)	7265 (8999)
Prestigious Curriculum (<i>n</i> =224)	.15 (.36)	.67*** (.48)	.09 (.29)	.10 (.30)	.08 (.27)
Prestigious Placement (<i>n</i> =253)	.21 (.41)	.62*** (.50)	.03*** (.18)	.16 (.37)	.41 (.50)
Controls					
Elementary only (<i>n</i> =271)	.38 (.49)	.33 (.48)	.57*** (.50)	.38 (.49)	.12 (.32)
Has Website	.76 (.43)	1.0** (0.0)	.68 (.47)	.77 (.42)	.75 (.44)
Name Change	.07 (.25)	0.0 (0.0)	.07 (.26)	.08 (.28)	.04 (.20)

*** denotes $p < .001$, ** denotes $p < .01$, * denotes $p < .05$

Note: Statistics in each cell are means or proportions with standard deviation in parentheses. Asterisks are derived from *T*-tests, which for the Elite segment compare means/proportions to all other segments combined; tests for the Religious segment compare to New Sector and International segments combined. Sample sizes for variables with some missing data are noted in the first column.

Table 1 shows that the Elite segment is by far the most stable. The first panel shows that Elite schools on average are considerably older and larger, and have the fewest births, deaths, and revocation of their credit-granting status. Indeed, the Elites were the lone segment to not have any organizational births, deaths, or revocations over the previous five years. Religious schools form the next most stable segment. Compared to the New Sector and International segments, religious schools are significantly older and larger. Also, the Religious segment has significantly fewer births than the New Sector and International segments, while having similar numbers of deaths and revocations. In general, schools in the New Sector and International segments tend to be the smallest, youngest and least stable, though not all differences are statistically significant.

Next, do segments differ in their institutional orientation? Are some more likely to follow standard conventions in education, and are others more technically-driven? The second panel of Table 1 shows that the Elite schools are by far the most ‘institutional.’ Almost all Elite schools are housed in traditional school buildings and located in traditional residential areas, and almost all advertise their accreditation. But, while most of the Elite segment embraces generalist curricula, a substantial minority of schools has specialist names and curricula (14% and 26% respectively), and thus, the Elite segment as a whole is not significantly less likely to seek niches than the other segments. This pattern suggests that compared to other segments, the Elite is quite institutional. Nonetheless, it operates in a market environment and thus needs to engage in many technical practices such as developing niche specialties. Thus, Market Theory has a strong kernel of empirical power, correctly predicting that even the most institutional segments of the market are affected by technical forces. But, we also emphasize that the market as a whole appears to have not homogenized into a series of openly competing niches, but instead has coalesced into a broader set of segments that serve to limit the scope of competition.

The Religious segment also has a mix of institutional orientations, though its mix is distinct. The second panel of Table 1 shows that Religious schools are significantly more likely to be housed in traditional school buildings than are New Sector and International schools, though only 22% of religious schools are in such spaces, again illustrating the pervasive power of technical forces in the marketplace. Most religious schools need to economize and locate in alternative kinds of buildings. Yet, in terms of pedagogy and curricula, almost no Religious schools adopt non-religious specialty names or curricula. Instead, they present themselves by their religious orientations, and do not attempt to compete on other grounds. And, only one quarter of Religious schools advertise accreditation with a professional body, making it the least likely segment to do so. We interpret this tendency as a signal that these schools have a stronger affiliation with their religious communities rather than with other educational bodies.

New Sector and International schools are in many respects the most technically-oriented. Table 1 shows that only 8% and 9% of New Sector and International schools are housed in traditional school buildings. This eschewing of physical conventions in the field may be a product of their lesser stability and their need to economize. Further, those two segments are the likeliest to have specialist names and curricula. In the New Sector, 31% and 45% of schools have specialist names and curricula, approximately double the proportion in the Elite segment, and much greater than the proportion for the Religious segment. Similarly, 60% of International schools have specialist names, which is double the proportion of any other segment. Yet, in others respects these segments have institutional orientations. About one-half and three-quarter of New Sector and International schools respectively advertise their accreditation, figures that are far lower than those for the Elite segment, but are significantly greater than those for the Religious segment. The International and New Sector

segments have a mix of orientations, being clearly technically driven on the one hand, yet also embracing some institutional norms.

The next panel of Table 1 examines the status orientations of schools. It shows that the Elite segment is by far the most status oriented. Elite schools charge by far the highest tuition fees, more than double those of any other segment. Their immediate locales also have the highest income earners and larger land values; again, both figures are approximately double the values for any other segment. And, the Elite schools are by far the likeliest to adopt prestigious curricula like AP and IB courses and advertise placing their graduates in prestigious universities. Roughly two-thirds of Elite schools engage in these status-oriented practices. In contrast, no more than 10% of schools in any other segment adopt prestigious curricula, and few advertise prestigious placement (their closest rival is the International segment, where 40% of schools advertise prestigious placement). Overall, the Elite segment is the likeliest to engage in status-oriented practices.

In contrast, the Religious segment is the least status oriented. Despite being older, larger, and having fewer recent births than New Sector and International schools, the Religious segment charges the lowest tuition fees and is the least likely to advertise prestigious placement (only 3% of Religious schools do so). We interpret this lack of status orientation to be a product of its faith-based mandate and community ties. The other segments have a mix of status orientations. While the New Sector, International and Religious segments differ little in their physical locales and low rates of adopting prestigious curricula, they differ in their advertising prestigious placement (as mentioned above, a significant plurality of International schools advertise).

Taken as a whole, these descriptive comparisons suggest that the Elite segment is the most stable and status oriented, and has a mix of institutional orientations. The Religious segment is also relatively stable, yet has the weakest status orientations and a mix of institutional orientations. New Sector and International segments are the least stable, and have complex mixes of conventional institutional traits and status orientations.

Multivariate Analyses

Table 2 displays regression coefficients for a series of logit and OLS regression models that predict a variety of organizational traits. The Table displays coefficients for each segment that control for school age, size, elementary level, whether a school had ever changed its name, and whether it had a website in 2015.

Table 2

Regression Coefficients for Models of Organizational Traits

Outcome	Elite	Religious	New Sector	R2 and N
<i>Institution vs Technical Orientation</i>				
Traditional Area	.074 (.846)	-.561 (.496)	-.044 (.435)	.18 (<i>n</i> =226)
Traditional Building	3.18 (.988)***	.584 (.676)	.021 (.643)	.31 (<i>n</i> =226)
Advertise	2.73 (1.31)*	-1.81 (.594)**	-.983 (.523)*	.21 (<i>n</i> =202)
Accreditation				
Specialist Name	-2.67 (.579)***	-3.85 (.703)***	-1.82 (.447)***	.21 (<i>n</i> =220)
Specialist Curricula	.128 (.869)	-.916 (.800)	.818 (.586)	.12 (<i>n</i> =141)

Status Orientation

Tuition	5516 (1244)***	-1407(940)	1331 (784)*	.36 (<i>n</i> =180)
Income in area	86278(26068)***	-6932 (17562)	25467 (15445)*	.27 (<i>n</i> =221)
Land Value	380433 (97243)***	44671 (65126)	111798 (57558)*	.26 (<i>n</i> =223)
Pop Density of Area	-1500 (2038)	-797(1362)	1989(1200)*	.06 (<i>n</i> =224)
Prestigious Curriculum	1.85 (.910)*	-.191 (.822)	.470 (.730)	.27 (<i>n</i> =191)
Prestigious Placement	.939 (.833)	-2.77 (.911)***	-.690 (.476)	.25 (<i>n</i> =210)

*** denotes 1 tailed $p < .001$, ** denotes $p < .01$, * denotes $p < .05$

Note: All models control for school size, age, whether or not a school is elementary only, whether it had a website by 2015, and whether it had ever changed its name. Statistics in each cell are either logit coefficients or regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).

Our models suggest that the Elite sector is the most institutional segment. Even after controlling for organizational age and size, Elite schools are the most likely to operate in traditional school buildings, are most likely to advertise their accreditation and are likeliest to have a generalist name. Further, the Elite segment has the strongest status orientations, charging high tuition, locating their physical plants in expensive settings, and adopting prestigious curricula. Thus, these models suggest that the practices of Elite schools are not mere byproducts of their stability and resources; instead, their practices also reflect conventions and expectations that predominate in that segment.

The other segments, however, have more mixed orientations. The Religious segment, for instance, eschews some status orientations, being less likely than other segments to advertise prestigious placements, even controlling for age and size. Religious schools also avoid advertising accreditation with a professional body, yet also avoid specialist (non-religious) names. Likewise, the New Sector appears to bear the imprint of technical forces even after controlling for age and size (those schools are significantly younger and smaller than are Elite and Religious schools). The New Sector is significantly less likely to advertise accreditation and is more likely to have a specialist name. Yet, that segment does embrace a status orientation, at least compared to International schools, the reference category: the New Sector charges relatively high tuition, and tends to locate in relatively high income, affluent areas. We interpret this pattern of coefficients as suggesting that the New Sector is a more technically-oriented version of the Elites: it needs to embrace specialty niches and economizing practices where necessary, but also adopts some status orientations. In a sense, these schools may be organizational upstarts: younger, smaller and more precarious versions of the Elite.

Discussion and Conclusion: The Social Foundations of School Markets

Market theory offers a fundamental basis for understanding private schools. In our study, even the most institutional regions of the marketplace - those inhabited by Elite and Religious schools - responded readily to technical pressures, whether by seeking pedagogical niches or locating in non-traditional buildings. But our framework provides an alternative account for understanding key *variations* in the effects of markets on school organizations. To understand those variations, we blend ideas from New Institutionalism and Economic Sociology, and recognize private schools as shaped not only by dictates of open market competition, but also by institutional norms and communities. Rather than seeing markets as unleashing generic competitive forces that continually erode institutional norms, we contend that those forces coalesce into a series of segments, each connected to a specific community or network, and each infused by different institutional norms. This process fragments the market, encouraging different schools to adopt very different organizational identities, mandates and goals. To test these ideas, we compared organizational structures and practices across

four market segments, and found them to have significantly different structures and practices, even after controlling for school age and size. Elite schools are very stable, embedded in networks of affluent families, and responsive to a unique combination of institutional conventions and status-orientations. Religious schools, in contrast, connect to various faith communities and are oriented towards moral education, not status. International schools are less stable, but being embedded in loose immigrant recruitment networks in other countries, they also adopt a unique mix of institutional, technical and status orientations. Likewise, the New Sector has its own mix of institutional, technical and status orientations. In some respects, our findings simply reflect a market in which a variety of suppliers get matched to clients with varied tastes and preferences. But taken as a whole, our broad pattern of findings suggests that market competition does not impose a uniform set of technical practices among all private schools. Due to the social embeddedness of school markets, private schools do not compete for clients in social vacuums, but are also shaped by communities and their differing institutional norms.

Indeed, our study leads us to think differently about the dynamics of school choice. Competitive forces can indeed have the power to undercut communities and institutional norms in education, but the reverse occurs as well: communities and norms become key bases for the formation of educational market segments. This explains why Toronto private schools, despite operating in a highly competitive market, do not invariably economize, seek niches and drop longstanding institutional conventions. Rather, their actions vary strongly by segment. Elites' social connections allow them to generate large endowments, which in turn shelters them from many technical forces and gives them a stability by which they engage in many luxurious practices. Schools in other segments must economize more, but they do so in diverging ways, reflecting the unique wants of their communities, whether animated by faith, norms of intensive childrearing, or wants of acculturation and language training. In sum, this recognition of the dynamic interplay between market forces, communities and institutional norms can provide a fuller understanding of neoliberal reforms in education. We believe that both opponents and proponents of those reforms tend to overstate their potential to transform school organizations. Market pressures certainly impact schools, but those effects are strongly mediated by social structures and norms.

We recommend two future directions for research on the effects of markets on schools. First, researchers should conduct longitudinal studies of entire populations of schools of choice, with an eye to their distinct paths and trajectories. For instance, the Elite segment continues to be embedded in a community that has historically sought exclusivity and prestige in education (Cookson & Persell, 2008; DiMaggio, 1982). Many Elite schools have long resembled English boarding schools, adopting their architectural styles, dress codes, and other organizational traits that have been associated with status and cultural refinement (Khan, 2011; Maxwell & Maxwell, 1985; Meadmore & Meadmore, 2004). But in recent decades, their academic and extra-curricular programs have become more robust, aimed at making their graduates increasingly competitive in elite university admissions (Baker, 2014; Khan, 2011). Thus, the Elite segment is increasingly mixing its historic signals of prestige with newer symbols of competitiveness.

The trajectory of the Religious segment may also be changing in North America. Those schools have long been composed of Jewish and Christian schools, and connected to churches, synagogues and temples that have provided direct support (e.g. funding, buildings) and a steady stream of clients. But the composition of this segment is changing in response to shifting demographics, at least in Toronto. In tables not shown, we found that the Christian branch of this segment is shrinking, suffering some organizational deaths without any new births. The Jewish branch in this segment is more stable. But Toronto's Islamic branch is growing, providing the bulk of newly opened Religious schools, while being less stable than Christian and Jewish schools. Toronto Islamic

schools are significantly younger, smaller, charge the lowest tuition fees, are likelier to have had their accreditation revoked, and operate outside of traditional and affluent areas, and without traditional physical plants. But these schools may soon change. They may be currently in a start-phase, now operating in “make-shift” manner, but over time, they may stabilize and adopt organizational traits that converge with those of Jewish and Christian schools.

While lacking the well-bounded communities of the Elite and Religious private schools, Toronto International schools are nevertheless connected to a kind of community, albeit one that is far looser and more dispersed. The “community” for International schools consists of a series of networks of recruiters of foreign students from Southeast Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. This loosely-bounded, diffuse social grouping encourages International schools to adopt some unique practices, such as offering language programs and acculturation functions such as tourist-styled field trips. Further, their survival is contingent on federal immigration policies that bring shifting numbers of clients year to year, and on foreign demand to enter North American universities. As universities in Asia, in particular, gain status and prestige, the market for international students wanting a North American education may shrink over time. Similarly, the community that fuels the New Sector is also diffuse and only loosely connected, united mainly by their intensive parenting styles and middle class notions of children’s intellectual and emotional development (see Lareau, 2010; Stevens, 2001; Wrigley, 1989). These norms generate a demand for learning environments that are increasingly individualized and nurturing (Aurini & Davies, 2004; Davies & Aurini, 2004; Urwin & Sharland, 1992), giving rise to the New Sector over the past 25 years, populated by Toronto’s youngest, smallest and least stable private schools. Since the Elite segment is very stable and largely impenetrable to newer schools, this segment may continue to grow if more and more ‘intensive’ parents seek private schooling. Our point here is that different segments of the private school market are likely to each take distinct trajectories in the coming decades.

A second avenue for future research would be to extend our framework to other settings. For instance, school markets in many U.S. cities consist of public schools, charter schools and Catholic schools. But unlike Toronto, race in those settings is a stronger driver of school choice, more so than religion and immigration. Also, unlike Toronto’s private school sector, those settings are less purely marketized; most U.S. schools of choice receive public funds and are regulated by state bodies. Nonetheless, their organizational traits may also be shaped by unique combinations of community ties and institutional norms. American research has found surprising levels of isomorphism among schools of choice (e.g., Lubienski, 2003; Lubienski & Lee, 2016), likely signaling the pervasiveness of strong institutional norms in American schooling. We look forward to other detailed studies from other jurisdictions that are mindful of ways that the social embeddedness of schools of choice can mediate market forces.

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