

Military Boarding School Perspectives of Parent Choice: A Qualitative Inquiry

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### Introduction

Theoretically all students in American schools have a right to quality free and public education, and they also have the choice to seek out and find equal access to this education. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002), a recent initiative aimed at producing diversity and equity in American education, reinforced the concept of “school choice” for public schooling. Presently, school choice represents a vast array of options including: public, private, charter, local neighborhood, magnet, theme/ career academy, boarding, military, etc. Parents have a variety of options to choose from so that they can attempt to match their children with appropriate education that meets individual needs. Although these choices are theoretically available for all students who attend public schools in the United States, some students, however, have additional choices available – those who are in the position to attend private secondary schools. Private schools, generally fully funded by parents, include traditional private school, religious schools, and various types of boarding schools.

Based on the definition of boarding schools, secondary military schools fall under the umbrella of boarding school education, and parent-selected secondary boarding school education is commonly viewed as an activity of the elite, upper class of society. A parent's decision to send his or her son into private boarding education is a social act designed, intentionally or unintentionally, to perpetuate the traits of the parent's social context (Cookson & Persell, 1985). Sectors in American society have exercised their right to seek out an educational experience for their children that reflects their values, which are loosely grouped into categories of discipline and self-reliance and college preparatory tracks.

Drawing from the rich tradition of European-styled military schools in America, themes emerge from the purposeful sampling addressing perspectives as to why parents choose to send their sons to military-style boarding schools. Research surrounding this clearly defined niche largely mirrors findings from non-military styled boarding schools; however, these specific schools of choice, essentially a subset of the various educational options that parents and their children may choose, represent a nuanced and specific culture with predictable outcomes and established patterns.

### Review of the Literature

#### *Private Schools and the Ruling Class*

A review of the extant literature in the arena of parent-selected boarding schools and military schools generates several key and pivotal issues concerning the background of private boarding education and its interconnectedness with the uppermost echelons of power and the social elite. Although there is a paucity of literature describing the phenomenon specific to military boarding schools, there is a wealth of information describing private boarding schools. Historically, boarding schools have undergone dramatic shifts in their focus and in their clientele. Initially an invention of the European Church to perpetuate the clergy, boarding schools made the transition toward government-sponsored schools and finally to their current state as places where the wealthy perpetuate their strata of class elitism (Kashti, 1998).

The literature about boarding schools and military schools reflects a great deal of consistency. Boarding school students and military school students, or military type secondary involvement, where pre-collegiate institutions instruct students in military-style education, discipline, and tradition, show some measurable signs of success. Students from either setting are generally considered to be part of an elite society because of the tuition levels of the boarding or military school setting (Kashti, 1998; Trow, 1984).

Boarding schools are typically agents of acculturation and socialization. They spread norms and values of the society in which they are situated. Elite boarding schools limit entry to groups that the schools deem worthy of admission. Traditionally, boarding schools select and prepare students to be active citizens (Kashti, 1998). Boarding schools train students to become productive members of their society, to contribute to its economy, and to defend their nation. (Recker, Goldsby, & Neck, 2002). Modern boarding school graduates are expected not only to participate in positive societal endeavors, but also to assume leadership roles in their communities. With the latter in mind, American boarding schools exist to produce leaders (Cookson & Persell, 1985).

#### *Two Types of Boarding Schools in the United States*

*American Indian children forced to attend government boarding schools.* One type of boarding school was the American government's forced removal of American Indian children from their homes to attend Christian or government-run boarding schools (Poupart, 2002; Smith, 2005; Weaver, 2002). Weaver (2002, ¶ 9) notes that this practice was formalized after the Civil War and called this a "shift from physical genocide to cultural genocide." She adds that policy focused on taking the Indian children from their families "often by force, and assimilating them into the American way of life through boarding schools based on a military model."

Poupart (2002, ¶ 15) discusses this "assimilation," noting it eroded "tribal sovereignty" and adding "the forceful removal of Indian children to off-reservation boarding schools was undeniably the most painful and damaging aspect of assimilation efforts. Torn from their families...Indian children were given Anglo names and groomed in the style of the dominant culture." Smith (2005, ¶ 8-9) points out that the Indian children were forced to worship as Christians, to speak English and were frequently sexually, physically and emotionally abused. She also indicates that "the primary role of this

education for Indian girls was to inculcate patriarchal norms and desires into Native communities, so that women would lose their places of leadership in Native communities.”

It should not be surprising to learn that after generations of this abuse and trauma, many current problems occurring within Indian communities – family violence, substance abuse, and suicide (Weaver, 2002, ¶ 9) can be viewed as the direct result of the boarding schools. Smith adds, ....it is generally the case that much, if not most, of the current dysfunctionality in Native communities can be traced to the boarding school era.

*Parent-selected boarding schools.* The boarding schools that parents choose for their children are clearly of quite a different nature. Boarding school enrollment declined slightly during the years 1981 to 1996, slipping by approximately 8% (Hicks, 1996). This drop in enrollment has been attributed to, among other things, the fact that boarding schools are a specialized, niche market (Recker et al.). Additionally, declining enrollment may be attributed to a public perception that boarding schools may not be as focused as they had been in the past on the lofty goals that they sought to achieve. Hicks (1996) speculates that this lack of focus on lofty goals may be the result of the ever-shifting focus of educational research and beliefs into what motivates students. Nonetheless, the necessity for boarding schools to maintain their focus on their overt goals is critical to their survival (Recker et al.).

The underlying method of socializing students in boarding schools in the United States is to isolate students from typical public socializing forces, strip away their individuality, and impress upon each student the importance of the schools' values and norms (Kingston, 1990). Because the American elite are theoretically not aristocratic, the binding commonalities for the upper class are not the same as the long-held British commonalities of the elite. Instead, the upper class is bound together by wealth and shared beliefs and values, not inherited title and adherence to feudal standards of blood and privilege (Persell & Cookson, 1990).

Because individuality is removed during the socialization process in boarding schools, students are forced to connect with each other. These social connections assist students to form cohesive friendships with other students in the school. These friendship bonds are the solder that binds the upper class together into an interconnected series of power relationships that transcend the school experience and often last through students' business, political, and social lives. It is in this way that the American upper class can sustain and maintain itself (Cookson & Persell, 1985).

A great number of people who hold or have held positions of power in the United States or who have hailed from privileged backgrounds of the wealthy elite in America were products of boarding schools. Anecdotally, there are many famous men who share the military-styled boarding school experience in common, despite their obvious divergence on the political spectrum. George W. Bush and his father attended Phillips Academy, and John F. Kennedy attended Choate. Additionally, Al Gore attended St. Albans; members of the Ford Family attended Hotchkiss School; Michael Eisner attended Lawrenceville School; Stephen King, Thomas Stearns Eliot, and members of the Kennedy family attended Milton Academy; George S. Patton, Oliver Stone, and members of the Trump family attended Hill School; and Stephen Sondheim attended the George School (Cookson & Persell, 1985). Further extending this list would prove prohibitively long.

It is not an easy task to find literature on connections between power and boarding schools in the United States. The paucity of such literature may stem from a desire to refrain from acknowledging that wealth and power in the United States may statistically be equated with a greater chance for success (Cookson & Persell, 1985). The American ideal that success is accessible to all members of a democracy negates such notions that wealth and power beget further wealth and power (Kashti, 1998).

*U.S. Military Secondary Schools*

Gahr (1999) notes that despite declining numbers in enrollment for traditional boarding schools, enrollment in military secondary boarding schools is increasing, and 95% of military high school graduates go on to a four-year university. This research also indicates that although military high schools were almost extinct in the 1960s and 1970s, many such military schools are operating at full capacity. The literature further maintains that military secondary schools "are not just training grounds for the armed forces" (Gahr, 1999, p. 58). Despite military schools' focus on military training, notable graduates of military secondary schools are part of the greater society and range from Warren Rudman, a former New Hampshire Senator, to J.D. Salinger, author of *Catcher in the Rye*. Gahr's (1999) study also found that "as secondary education drowns in foolish educational theory, military high schools operate on a winning formula: hard work, loyalty, a sense of community and individual purpose, and personal discipline" (p. 58).

Gahr (1999) contends that the military school theme, because of its success, is spreading throughout public school districts of the United States. Citing current actions by the Defense and Education Departments, he reports there are currently 40 Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) academies in the United States, with more "in the works" (p. 59).

Despite a long tradition of military secondary education in the United States, there are very few articles or research studies available that illustrate the current status of these educational institutions. Also lacking is any recent study about boarding schools in the United States. Successful models for alternative forms of education have come into existence in the private sphere, and private education, such as military schools, should be explored more thoroughly. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to examine why parents choose to send their sons to a military secondary boarding school in lieu of a traditional boarding school.

## Methods

### *Design/Rationale for Qualitative Approach*

This study focused on the experiences and choices of parents who sent their sons to a secondary military boarding school; thus, the qualitative tradition was selected. The "qualitative approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p.13). Following extensive interviews with participants, based upon semi-structured question sets, parents were asked to reflect on the phenomenon of the school choice that they made for their children. Nuanced responses addressed central themes that ass to the understanding of this practice.

### *Data Generation, Collection, and Processing*

After the researchers received university IRB approval to conduct the research, three military secondary boarding schools in the United States were selected for the study. The ethnic composition of the three schools, similar to most parent-selected military boarding schools, is primarily wealth Whites and South Americans. Selection of these military schools was based on the ability of one of the researchers to gain access to the schools because of prior, cursory relationships with the schools' administrators. Although not for the sake of convenience, the researchers deemed that these schools were best representative of military-styled boarding schools that exercise traditional practice. Each of the administrators at the three military schools granted permission for the research to be conducted. Each school leader recognized the value of the research because of its relevance to the military secondary boarding school tradition.

*Participants.* Twelve of the participants were parents of sons in attendance at three military secondary boarding schools in the United States. The participants represented a purposeful sample (Creswell, 1998), and their selection was based on an insider informant technique. The researchers

requested that the administration at the military schools provide lists of possible candidates. Once the lists were collected from the schools, the researchers selected eight possible candidates from each of the three military schools. Recruitment/consent letters were sent to parents who met the inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria for participation in this study required that participants have a son enrolled in a secondary military boarding school at the time of the interview. Participants were included in this study based on the order in which they responded to the recruitment/consent letters. The recruitment/consent letters contained specific information regarding the purpose of the study, as well as information regarding confidentiality. Four parents were chosen from each of the three schools. Selection of participants was not made on the basis of marital status of parents. Participants included one parent for each son.

*Instrument.* The researchers developed the interview protocol based on a review of the literature and the concepts related to parent choice (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Gahr, 1999; Kashti, 1998; Kingston, 1990; Recker et al., 2000; Trow, 1984).

*Data generation and analysis.* The process of collecting information within the qualitative tradition hinges on in-depth interviews (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996). The face-to-face, open-ended interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes (Polkinghorne, 1983) and were analyzed in keeping with Creswell's (1998) indications that self-reflection be among the preparatory steps for research analysis.

Once interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim, the researchers hand coded transcripts to look for themes, patterns, or clusters of meanings. The transcripts were divided into statements through horizontalization techniques. Statements were then separated into clusters of meanings. The emergent data were connected into a "textural description of what was experienced and a structural description of how it was experienced. Once these descriptions were developed, an

essential, invariant structure was derived about the experience in order to find emergent underlying structure about the meaning" (Creswell, 1998, p. 55).

Use of N6 Software enabled the researchers to collect and organize text, along with coding memos and findings, into a project or "hermeneutic unit." The software further facilitated the analysis and interpretation, particularly the selecting, coding, annotating, and comparing of noteworthy segments.

*Steps to ensure trustworthiness.* During analysis, the researchers sorted formulated meanings into groups representing themes and used the software for additional analysis of the transcripts. Dependability, an aspect of trustworthiness, is whether the process of the study is consistent and reasonable over time and across researchers and methods (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2000). Dependability is parallel to reliability and shows that the process of inquiry is logical, traceable, and documented (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The preservation of the verbatim transcripts served as another determinant of dependability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researchers also used member checking; participants reviewed transcripts in order to clarify statements made during the interviews (Krefting, 1991).

Transferability, parallel to external validity, addresses the issue of generalization in terms of case-to-case transfer. The findings of this study may or may not be transferable to certain other settings; this determination will be made by the reader. However, the use of verbatim quotes helps to support this possibility.

Confirmability, parallel to objectivity, establishes the whether the data and interpretations of the inquiry have logical and clear linking associations, findings, and interpretations of the data (Guba &

Lincoln, 1989). The researchers attempted to be reflexive and to set aside biases during the analysis phase of the study and compared individual analyses of the interviews and discussed biases.

Credibility, or truth-value, as defined by Maxwell (1996) is the correctness of a description, conclusion, explanation, or interpretation. Credibility is parallel to internal validity and provides assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their experiences and the researchers' reconstructions and representation of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In order to enhance credibility, the researchers included low inference descriptors or verbatim comments, looked for responses that might disconfirm expectations, and attempted to maintain self awareness of biases (Johnson, 1999).

### Findings

These findings focus on the responses of parents regarding the reasons, catalysts, and desired outcomes that led to their decisions to send their sons to a military secondary boarding school.

#### *Why Parents Chose a Military School*

There are specific reasons why parents select a military secondary boarding school instead of a traditional boarding school for their sons. Interestingly, one set of parent responses centered around the parents' moral value systems. These parents noted the prevalence of a co-educational atmosphere at traditional boarding schools resulted in moral and value-related problems and negative distractions for their sons. Specifically, one parent discussed such an atmosphere in a traditional boarding school that her son had once attended before military school. She noted:

A lot of women there are ...very "loosy goosy" as far as morals and values; you've got these professors and teachers jumping in and out of relationships with other teachers, or you've got a girls' dorm aid bringing in her fiancé on a Saturday night, these kids are and they know what's going on they hear all kinds of noises; I'm paying, and those kinds of values are shoved in my kid's face.

Though her remarks explore a compelling aspect of single-gender education, her overarching opinion is that the school context has a deontological obligation to reflect a sub textual moral code. Unknowingly, she has repeated the early mandate of the single-gendered boarding school experience as it was practiced in the European, ecclesiastical tradition, where aspiring clerics engaged in disciplined study in an environment theoretically free of distraction. Similarly, another parent stated that a military school was, “more of a character-building institute, if you will, over the general prep school. We know that he is going to be in a good social environment.” Therefore, the notion that parents are sending their sons to environments that emphasize self-discipline resonates throughout various informants’ responses.

In addition to self-governance and self-discipline, some parents indicated a desire for their sons to be judged based on their own performance, which emerges as a corollary to self-reliance. Several parents stated that they wanted their sons to attend a military school in lieu of a traditional boarding school because of an overt desire to mitigate any privilege of inherited wealth and prestige issues. One parent stated, “I knew that [at]boarding school he would be judged on his own merits instead of our merits.” Interestingly, the notion of building one’s character and standing one one’s own two feet reflects in interesting paradox. Although military-styled boarding schools are elitist by their very nature, parents support schools that foster a within group competition with the ultimate hope that their sons will find primacy amid the already designated elite. Essentially, military schools establish not only a cohort of uniquely qualified privilege, but they also foster an additional competition for success in a relatively level playing field. For this additional nuance, parents are willing to encourage their sons to attend.

Not only do military-styled boarding schools provide competition among a group of highly selected aspirants, but the culture fosters and supports competitive and successful social behaviors. This

choice of military boarding school over a non-military boarding school is best captured by another parent who added:

We felt that there was too much liberty for the children. And we felt that the wealth of your parents figured very greatly in that. And we didn't want our son to be in a nest of very rich children, because we wanted him to succeed because of who he was, not who we were.

Again, the notion that non-military styled schools are far too liberal resonates and the notion that within the select group of military school cadets, there is a clear sense of competition that can only be won through personal perseverance and individual fortitude.

Often parents are not the only group choosing to send their sons to military schools, as a number of parents indicated their sons made their own choice to attend military schools themselves. One parent said, “he chose it. He is very much into the military way in life; he was at a French school prior to going to the military academy, and he decided that a military school is what he wanted to do...” Another parent echoed, “he actually chose it....and after one semester in boarding school, private boarding school, he said he wanted to go to military school, so he could improve his grades.” An additional parent pointed out “it was a decision taken mostly by my son. This is what I want to do; this is how I want to improve my grades. And it has proven to be that. I mean he's on the honor roll.” Surprisingly though, disciplinary issues were not indicated as a reason for parents choosing military boarding schools, and half of the parents who indicated that their sons had no behavioral issues at home or in school prior to attending military school. One parent stated, “he's ...really a wonderfully-behaved person, and he gets along and plays well with others.” Another parent stated, “so he was well-liked, popular, wasn't a scholar, but he was a good kid--good grades, people liked him.” A different parent noted:

He had several awards for citizenship and so forth. And at the boarding school where he last attended, he had, he was one of the most popular kids. I mean he had absolutely no problems.

Socially, he's a well-adjusted kid.

As the informants assert, there are multiple reasons why parents choose to send their sons to military schools, and despite the importance of socialization and its apparent improvement through disciplined instruction, parents and their appreciate establishment for its intrinsic value.

#### *Desired Outcomes for Sons in Military Schools*

Parents also discussed desired outcomes for their sons including: discipline, structure, responsibility, self-sufficiency, and college preparation; these themes emerged from the narratives.

*Discipline and Self-Reliance.* Parents explained that they wanted their sons to receive or come away with discipline from a military school. One parent said:

I think military school should teach him discipline and mostly the discipline of studying, which a lot of the kids lack, and our kids certainly lacked. I couldn't teach them how to study. I want him to have the discipline to study.

Another stated, "I chose the military form because of its discipline and drill, which enables young men to focus properly." Still another added, "I really thought that as opposed to boarding school --that was non-military--I thought that just the toughness and the regimen would be good for him." Finally, one parent noted, "If he thinks he can slack, he will. I don't want him to slack off anymore. They don't let him do that there."

Seven parents from the selected sampling said that the structured environment in military school appealed to them and/or that they wanted their sons to be able to implement structure in their own lives.

One parent revealed that:

He did not have to leave home because of discipline problems. He did not have to leave home because of any problems he had in school or anything like that. The reason for him to go to boarding school was for him to go to a school where he had perhaps a more challenging situation, more to keep his interest so that he would be less scattered during school time. I really hadn't found that kind of structure with the kind of excellent educational opportunities at a standard boarding school. Some of them had the excellent educational opportunities of the standard boarding school, but might not have had the structure that he needed, I felt. So we debated it back and forth, and sent him to a military academy.

Another parent indicated:

A very dear friend of mine had sent her son to the school that our son now attends, because of the nice structure and all of those things...the environment was a good fit for our son and the structure of a military school also helped him organize his time better.

Further supporting this concept, one parent said," I wanted my son to be in an environment that was organized and structured. The military school offered that. That was important." Another added, "I just think that structure and doing things and being on time are all elements of good work habits and those types of things....Also, self-organization; he still has problems with that, time management."

Most of the parents discussed their belief that they wanted their son to learn the importance of responsibility during his military school experience. One stated:

What he does is up to him, and what he accomplishes is only equal to what he puts in. He has found this out on his own by working within the system. He gets certain rewards. He just got promoted, but you can tell that there's a little bit more swagger in the step. He pretends that's not important, but obviously it is. Those things I think will stand him well throughout his life

because obviously, if you realize at an early age that you are going to get out of something what you put into it, and that you are ultimately responsible for your actions.

Another parent added that she wanted his experience in military school to “make him independent and make him responsible.” Finally, a parent added, “It was important that he have a level of achievement and that he be rewarded according to his actions and that he be responsible for his actions--that there would be consequences.”

Several parents indicated a desire for their sons to learn to be self-sufficient while at a military school. One noted:

It's a wonderful, character-building school. It just really builds character, and it builds ethics, and I'm really impressed. He's in a wellness class right now, and I'm really impressed with the issues that they're covering right now about wellness, and it's brought up some really great discussion for us and him. I want him to learn how to take care of himself.

Ultimately, themes involving: discipline, structure, responsibility, self-sufficiency resonated through the parents' narratives, as they shared a common goal of procuring the best and most suitable school environment for their sons through the time-tested curricular offerings in a military-style education.

*College Preparation.* Several parents stated they wanted their sons to be prepared for college after military school. The focus of their responses was on their sons' decision-making abilities. One parent stated:

My expectation is that the education he gets from this military boarding school will prepare him for college, so college isn't so overwhelming. You get to college and, wow I don't know have to listen to mom and dad, and you know a lot of freshmen go off the deep end, they party more, and they're not as focused.

Another parent discussed development of thinking skills saying, “Military school forces them to be more critical thinkers. So my expectation is when he goes to college, because he has had that, he’ll be able to make better decisions in college.” Another parent offered the following:

He seems to think it’s a shot in the arm for the military. But, I don’t know, I don’t know enough about it, really. But, that’s what he intends to do, go to college for four years, come out as a first or second lieutenant, and join the army, and has a career in the army.

Finally, a parent offered the following perspective:

Well I’m hoping it will get him into West Point he can then complete his education there and then he wants to go into special forces, so this is goal and hoping it will put him in good stand even if he decides to change his mind and he wants to go into Florida University than I think he will stand in good position.

Through the time-tested skills obtained through discipline, structure, responsibility, self-sufficiency, informants had high expectations for their sons, and college preparation was a nearly unanimous goal.

## Discussion

### *Parent Choice Based on Morals and/or Values*

Parents discussed specific, overt reasons for selecting a military school over a traditional boarding school for their sons. Their comments revealed that some parents had negative predilections about boarding schools, so they opted for a military-styled school as an alternative. Specifically, parents felt that traditional boarding schools failed to provide a morally-sound environment for their sons. Some parents who had chosen a military school for their sons had done so after sending their sons to and withdrawing their sons from a traditional boarding school. Such choices support Durkheim’s (1956) supposition that society prepares its children and its subsequent generations through education. This behavior on the part of these parents shows that they have strong desires to inculcate moral

practices similar to their own moral practices into their sons' lives, thus perpetuating and preserving their own belief structure and social context.

Extending Durkheim's (1956) thinking points out that parents chose a military school for their sons because of a perceived shortcoming in the essential condition of society's current existence. This relates to the findings concerning parents' statements regarding their placement of importance on a need for education to emphasize behavior that includes practices of marriage before co-habitation and/or pre-marital sexual relations. Some parents specifically indicated that they did not want their sons to see women at boarding schools entertain overnight or late-night guests.

#### *Parent Choice Based on Structure*

Additionally, parents indicated they made a conscious choice of military schools because such schools were able to provide a more structured, rigorous lifestyle for their sons. Parents specifically stated that they felt that traditional boarding schools provided an environment that was too relaxed on a disciplinary/structural level.

Some parents felt that a military school provided a simpler social lifestyle than did a traditional boarding school. The belief that military schools may provide a simpler life for students in comparison with traditional boarding schools is consistent with Kingston (1990), who asserts that life in boarding schools is not easy and that students in these (traditional boarding) schools face tremendous pressure to succeed internally by negotiating highly-structured academic curricula.

#### *Parent Choice Based on a Desire to Remove Advantage*

A somewhat surprising finding is that several parents discussed their choice to send their sons to a military school on the specific grounds that in this type of school, their sons' results would be based on their own merits and personal accomplishments at the military school. These parents voiced a desire to remove any advantage their sons may have because of parent wealth or power. Parents who

discussed this issue stated that they specifically wanted to remove any elite status they may have attained. This finding is inconsistent with the literature regarding attendance at traditional boarding schools as a vehicle for the elite. Powell (1996) indicates that boarding schools have become devoted to societal and political upper class preservation. Boarding school activities further reinforce this role as exclusive status symbols. Furthering the propositions that Powell (1996) advances, the literature indicates that traditional boarding schools foster an elite social structure designed to groom students for elite life. Moreover, the literature suggests that there is a cyclical relationship between a school that produces successful, powerful graduates and the school's desirability for the socially elite to perpetuate the results in their children (McLachlan, 1970).

*Parent Choice Based on Wishes of Son and Parents Views of the Son's Needs*

Parents generally did not view their military school decisions as punitive measures. Half of the parents discussed their willingness and/or desire to allow their sons to be included in or to make the final military school choice. Such responses resonate with Recker et al. (2002), who observes that today's student may have a greater role in the decision as to what school he or she attends. Because children have a greater voice than they did in the past, their fates no longer lie within the sole discretion of their parents.

Half of the parents indicated that they did not choose a military school for their sons because of behavioral problems. The remaining parents explained that their sons exhibited behavioral problems at home, school or both. Regarding those parents, the behavioral problems were limited to areas including their sons' disrespectful behavior at school or at home. Two parents indicated that they sent their sons to a military school as a result of a pivotal event. These parents noted that, at a certain point, their sons' behaviors had become so unacceptable that they felt there was no other choice but to send their sons to

a military school. These findings are not consistent with generally held perceptions that military schools house only poorly behaved or troubled students (Gahr, 1999).

Several parents explained that their sons were not sufficiently challenged in school before attending a military school, which may have given rise to behavioral problems. Other parents indicated that their sons were gifted and that they felt that a military school would provide a more challenging environment for their sons.

Although half of the parents discussed displeasure with their sons' grades, each one stated that the academic difficulty was borne out of their son's lack of motivation. No parents reported that their sons were incapable of academic success because of severe learning disabilities. Supporting this finding, Gahr (1999) indicates that military schools provide motivation through peer pressure and notes that students failing at military schools are pressured into success by their peers in order to gain privilege for the group. The group is not able to exercise privileges unless each individual within the group is successful. This community pressure stresses both individual and group success.

Parents also discussed choosing a military school for their sons in order to instill in their sons certain traits, behaviors or abilities. These responses comport with the literature. Gahr (1999) found that "...military high schools operate on a winning formula: Hard work, loyalty, a sense of community and individual purpose, and personal discipline" (p. 58).

Parents discussed overt desires for their sons to learn or live a disciplined life. Most felt that discipline was critical to their sons' lives now and in the future. Structure also weighed heavily in this theme. More than half of the parents discussed the importance of structure in their son's lives, contending that structure related directly to the more challenging environment of military schools. Additionally, parents asserted that structure was critical to future success and equated structure with organizational skills.

Parents who sent their sons to a military school wanted their sons to learn a sense of responsibility. Eleven parents indicated that responsibility was crucial to their son's education. Several parents said that they wanted their sons to be responsible for their own decisions and that they felt that a military school provided an environment where their sons would be surrounded by responsible men. Other parent discussions centered on responsibility as it relates to achievement of success. Parents also discussed self-sufficiency. These parents felt that the military school environment provided their sons with the opportunity to learn to take care of themselves.

Findings in the area of desired outcomes of parents who send their son to a secondary military boarding school correlate with Durkheim (1956) and the "cultural literacy" model. This may stem from an overt or covert desire on each parent's part to maintain the social fabric of his or her own upbringing. Because military secondary and traditional boarding school students are grounded in similar traditions of education, the schools produce students who have shared common experiences both inside and outside the classroom. It is in this way that boarding schools successfully indoctrinate their students into the culture that they or the parents desire to promote (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1987). Extending this trend, Durkheim states, "All educational practices...follow from the influence exercised by one generation on the following generation with an eye to adapting the latter to the social milieu in which it is called upon to live" (p. 95).

Findings show that parents of sons who attend military schools are similar to traditional boarding school parents in their desire to inculcate traits into their children. Parents who choose military schools, however, cite specific reasons for their choice and differentiate themselves from traditional boarding school parents. These differences rest in military school parents' desire to inculcate traits more akin to a quality work ethic than to promoting advantages over others by including their sons within an elite portion of society.

Parents also desired for their sons to be prepared for college. The responses were not, however, academically driven. Instead, parents emphasized college preparation in relation to their sons' ability to focus and remain strong in the face of a liberal lifestyle. This trend is incongruent with the literature on this topic as it relates to traditional boarding school attendance. Power et al. (1999) finds that social networks of boarding school students' parents were able to generate more influence assisting with college admissions. None of the interviewed military school parents voiced knowledge of or desire to participate in social networks to assist in their son's college attendance.

### Conclusions

The findings of this study support a variety of conclusions. The most compelling theme to emerge is the notion of choosing schools for internal moral reasons. The research elucidated the fact that parents who send their sons to military schools have specific reasons for choosing military secondary boarding schools over traditional boarding school that include moral decisions, desires for structure for their sons and an overt desire to remove advantage from their sons' lives. Interestingly, the informants in the study did not base their decision on the elite status of the military school, and some of the sons who attend military secondary boarding schools choose to do so, as opposed to their parents compelling them to do so under the strict recommendation of a previous school. For parents who choose military schools for their sons to instill certain traits in them, they generally do not do so because of serious disciplinary problems, although in some cases, parents choose military schools for their sons because of their sons' poor academic performance.

Other points of interest included parents who send their sons to military schools differ in their desires for their sons' futures as they relate to desires for power and wealth. Parents of sons who attend military schools espouse traditional values that focus on responsibility and the belief that hard work will lead to success.

This study contributes to the literature in the area of secondary military boarding schools as a subset of all boarding schools. The study identifies specific reasons why parents choose to send their sons to secondary military boarding schools in lieu of traditional boarding school. This study contributes to a body of literature that focuses on traditional boarding schools and neglects secondary military boarding schools as a subset of those boarding schools. It is apparent from this study that parents who choose military schools for their sons in lieu of traditional boarding schools do so in order to achieve specific goals for their sons. Insights raised in this study may be beneficial to parents who are facing similar decisions and secondary military boarding schools that seek to meet the needs of this specific niche of the population.

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## Appendix A

### Interview

1. Did you explore other educational settings such as a non-military boarding school before selecting a military school for your son? Please explain.
2. Why did you choose the military school setting for your son?
3. Do you have any relatives, friends, or sons of friends who have attended or presently attend military school?
4. What did you know or learn about military school before enrolling your son? Please explain.
5. What critical issue, if any, convinced you to send your son to military school?
6. Were you pleased with you son's grades before you decided to send him to military school? Please explain.

7. In your opinion, was your son well behaved in school before he came to this military school? Please explain.
8. In your opinion, was your son well behaved at home before he came to this military school? Please elaborate.
9. Is your child a 12th grader? If not: Do you want your son to attend military school for more than one year?
10. What are your expectations regarding what a military school will do for your son? Please explain.
11. Do you want your son to join the military or attend a military college upon completion of his high school education? Please explain.