

Military Boarding School Perspectives of Parental Choice: A Qualitative Inquiry

Erik Shane, PhD
Nancy L. Maldonado, PhD
Candace H. Lacey, PhD
Steve D. Thompson, PhD

ABSTRACT. Some parents choose to send their children to military-style boarding schools for a variety of reasons. Abundant scholarly literature addresses traditional boarding schools. Far less is available addressing the choice of military boarding schools as an educational option. This qualitative study investigates why parents send their sons to military boarding schools in lieu of traditional boarding schools. A purposeful sample of parents participated in the study. Data collection and analysis followed from open-ended, semistructured interviews. Findings indicated that parents had desired outcomes for their sons, including discipline, structure,

Erik Shane, PhD, is Dean of Students at La Salle High School, Miami, FL (E-mail: drshane@leadingandlearning.net).

Nancy L. Maldonado, PhD, is Education Director for Virtual Sage Online Publishers (E-mail: nlmaldonado@bellsouth.net).

Candace H. Lacey, PhD, is a program Professor at Nova Southeastern University's Fischler School of Education and Human Services, North Miami Beach, FL (E-mail: chlacey@bellsouth.net).

Steve D. Thompson, Ph.D., is Director of the Office of Information and Communication at Nova Southeastern University's Fischler School of Education and Human Services, North Miami Beach, FL (E-mail: sthompson99@hotmail.com).

Address correspondence to: Steve D. Thompson, Office of Information and Communication at Nova Southeastern University's Fischler School of Education and Human Services, 1750 NE 167th Street, North Miami Beach, FL 33162-3017 (E-mail: sthompson99@hotmail.com).

responsibility, self-sufficiency, and college preparation. Themes emerged addressing class, elitism, traditional values, and subculture norming.

KEYWORDS. Military, boarding schools, school choice, traditionalism, discipline

INTRODUCTION

All students in American schools have a right to quality free and public education. The No Child Left Behind Act¹ has reinforced the concept of “school choice” for public schooling. Presently, school choice represents an array of educational options, including public, private, charter, local neighborhood, magnet, theme/career academy, boarding, and, in some cases, military schools. Some families choose to exercise their right to school choice by selecting boarding schools or military boarding schools. Private boarding schools typically include traditional private schools, both secular or religious. Military schools generally include those designed for academic accomplishment and college preparation and those that are for behavioral corrections or social rehabilitation.

Parents decide to send their children to military boarding schools for a variety of reasons. Often this decision is a social act designed, intentionally or unintentionally, to perpetuate the social beliefs of the parents.² Some sectors in American society have exercised their right to seek out an educational experience for their children to reflect values such as discipline, self-reliance, and college preparatory tracks. Military boarding schools are the schools of choice for a significant sector of the overall school market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

The ever changing school choice movement has broadened. Many schools catering to nearly every taste and educational niche have emerged. Similar to consumer demand in the broader U.S. market, schools have transformed into a service best suited for those who are willing to purchase a perceived and packaged type.³ Parents send their children to schools for many reasons; some of the more exotic include: democratic choice,⁴ religious determinism,⁵

prestige,⁶ therapy,⁷ discipline,⁸ articulation to a military service academy,⁹ parental oversight,¹⁰ dropout prevention,¹¹ and alternatives to incarceration.¹² One of the lesser-studied aspects of the school choice movement relies on a return to the traditionalism of eighteenth century Enlightenment.¹³

These schools tend to fall into one of two categories: *academic* models touting tradition, rigor, and commonly-shared values, or *reform* school models instilling discipline, duty, and forced conformity through socialization.¹⁴ Research on schools¹⁵ of choice show that religion, socioeconomic status, age, number of children, and religion play significant roles in parental choice of religious schools,¹⁶ but race, gender, urban residence, and family composition make no difference.¹⁷ Military schools and parental choice to extend military training through boarding schools remain largely a question of parental heritage and experience.¹⁸ The number of military boarding schools has fluctuated over the years. From their heyday of more than 900 military schools between 1783 and 1914, approximately 40 remain.¹⁹ While the choice of attending military board schools has always existed, the option has recently experienced a minor resurgence.²⁰

Private Schools and the U.S. Ruling Class

Little literature describing military boarding schools is found;²¹ conversely, however, there is a wealth of information describing private boarding schools.²² Historically, private boarding schools have undergone dramatic shifts in their focus and in their clientele.²³ Initially, an invention of the European Church to perpetuate the clergy, private boarding schools made a transition toward government-sponsored schools and finally to their current state as places where the wealthy are educated.²⁴ This is especially true in the United States.²⁵ The literature about boarding schools and military schools reflects a great deal of consistency.²⁶ Boarding school students and military school students show some measurable signs of success.²⁷ Students from these settings, private military and private secular boarding schools, are generally considered to be part of an elite society simply due to the relative tuition levels.²⁸

Boarding schools are agents of acculturation and socialization.²⁹ They spread the norms and values of the society in which they are situated. Elite boarding schools limit entry to students whom the schools deem worthy of admission; high selection criteria equate to an increased perceived reputation.³⁰ Traditionally, boarding schools select and prepare students to be active citizens.³¹ They train students to become productive members of their society, to contribute to its economy, and to defend their nation.³² 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.³³ This mission is similar in both varieties of selective military and nonmilitary secular boarding schools.³⁴

Parent-Selected Boarding Schools

Overall, boarding school enrollment declined slightly during the years 1981 to 1996, slipping by approximately 8 percent.³⁵ This drop in enrollment has been attributed to, among other things, the fact that boarding schools are a specialized, niche market.³⁶ In addition, 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. 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.³⁷ Nonetheless, the necessity for boarding schools to maintain their focus on their overt goals is critical to their survival.³⁸ Akin to traditional military practice, 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 on each student the importance of the schools' values and norms.³⁹

Since individuality is removed during the socialization process in military boarding schools, students are socialized to interact with one another.⁴⁰ Social connections help students form cohesive friendships with other students in the school. Friendship bonds are the solder that binds the upper class together into an interconnected series of power relationships that move beyond the school experience and often last through students' business, political, and social lives.⁴¹ It is in this way that the American upper class can sustain and maintain itself.⁴² Consequently, a significant 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.⁴³ Anecdotally, there are many famous men who share the boarding school experience in common, despite their obvious divergence on the political spectrum.⁴⁴ George W. Bush and his father attended Phillips Academy, and John F. Kennedy attended Choate. 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.⁴⁵ There is a long history of the European concepts

of pedigree and perpetuation of the hierarchical caste system. Similarly, Americans have promoted the idea that success is accessible to those with means and that wealth and power bring forth more wealth and power.⁴⁶

U.S. Military Secondary Schools

Despite declining numbers in enrollment for traditional boarding schools, enrollment in military secondary boarding schools is increasing.⁴⁷ Research also indicates that although military high schools were virtually extinct in the 1960s and 1970s, more and more military schools are operating at full capacity.⁴⁸ Literature further maintains that military secondary schools are not just training grounds for the armed forces.⁴⁹ Despite military schools' focus on military training, notable graduates of military secondary schools are part of the greater society. Graduates range from Warren Rudman, a former New Hampshire Senator, to J. D. Salinger, author of *Catcher in the Rye*. Many military boarding schools divert attention from educational theory and instead operate on what they consider a winning formula: hard work, loyalty, a sense of community, individual purpose, and personal discipline.⁵⁰ Gahr⁵¹ 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 to come.

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.⁵² 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 some parents choose to send their sons to a military secondary boarding school instead of a traditional boarding school.

METHODS

Design

To obtain comprehensive descriptions providing the basis for reflective analysis,⁵³ the researchers interviewed parents who sent their sons to a secondary military boarding school. The study emerged as phenomenology, the description of one or more individuals' shared experience.⁵⁴

Data Generation, Collection, and Processing

Parents from three military secondary U.S. boarding schools were selected for the study. The ethnic composition of the three schools, similar to a broader cohort of parent-selected military boarding schools, is primarily wealthy European-American whites and South Americans. Selection of three military schools was based on one of the researcher's informant status. This enabled the researcher to gain access to the three military schools due to prior, close professional relationships with the schools' administrators. Each of the administrators at the three military schools granted permission for the research.

Participants

The 12 participants included in the study were a purposeful sample; all possessed specific and consistent criterion for inclusion. They had experienced having a son who attended military school, and they were willing to discuss the topic.⁵⁵ The researchers requested that the administrators at the military schools provide lists of possible participants; the administrators cooperated and sent names of potential participants. Once the lists were collected from the schools, the researchers sent recruitment/consent letters containing specific information regarding the purpose of the study as well as information regarding confidentiality. All security protocols protecting human subjects were in place and practiced throughout the study.

Participants were included for consideration based on the order in which they responded to the recruitment/consent letters. Four parents from each of the three schools were selected; each had a son currently enrolled in military school. Selection of participants was not made on the basis of marital status of parents.

Instrument

The researchers developed the interview protocol based on a review of the literature and the concepts related to parent choice.⁵⁶

Data Generation and Analysis

The process of collecting information within the qualitative tradition hinges on in-depth interviews.⁵⁷ The face-to-face, open-ended interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes⁵⁸ and were analyzed in keeping with Creswell's⁵⁹ concept that self-reflection is the preparatory step 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 relevant segments, following a process called “horizontalization.”⁶⁰ Statements were then separated into clusters of meanings. The emergent themes led to a “textural description of what was experienced and a description of how it was experienced.”⁶¹ After hand-coding, the transcripts were analyzed using qualitative analysis software.

Steps to Ensure Trustworthiness

During analysis, the researchers sorted meanings into groups representing themes and used qualitative 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.⁶² Dependability is parallel to reliability and shows that the process of inquiry is logical, traceable, and documented.⁶³ Using verbatim transcripts and member checking (participants reviewed transcripts) contributed to dependability.⁶⁴

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 whether the data and interpretations of the inquiry have logical and clear linking associations, findings, and interpretations.⁶⁵ The researchers attempted to be reflexive and to set aside biases during the analysis phase of the study and compared individual analyses of the transcripts and discussed biases.

Credibility, or truth-value is the correctness of a description, conclusion, explanation, or interpretation.⁶⁶ Credibility is parallel to internal validity and provides assurances of the fit between participants’ views of their experiences and the researchers’ reconstruction and representation of the data.⁶⁷ In order to enhance credibility, the researchers included verbatim comments and attempted to maintain self-awareness of biases.⁶⁸

FINDINGS

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. One set of parent responses emphasized their moral value systems. These parents noted that the prevalence of a coeducational atmosphere at traditional boarding schools resulted in moral and value-related problems and negative distractions for their sons. Specifically, one parent discussed such a negative atmosphere in a traditional boarding school that her son had once attended. She discussed what she perceived as inappropriate relationships between teachers and inappropriate activities in student dormitories. She noted, "I'm paying and those kinds of values are shoved in my kid's face."

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." The notion that parents sent their sons to schools that emphasized self-discipline resonated throughout various participants' 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." The concept of building character and at the same time standing on one's own two feet reflects an interesting paradox.

Not only do military-style 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 a military boarding school over a nonmilitary boarding school is best captured by a parent who stated:

We felt that there was too much liberty for the children. And we felt that the wealth of 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.

Often parents did not make the choice to send their sons to military schools. A number of parents indicated their sons made their own choice to attend military schools. 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 private boarding school, he said he wanted to go to military school, so he could improve his grades.” A third 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. He’s on the honor roll.”

Surprisingly, disciplinary issues were not indicated as a reason for parents choosing military boarding schools, and half of the parents indicated that their sons had no behavioral issues at home or in school prior to attending military school. As an example, one parent noted, “He had several awards for citizenship and so forth. And at the boarding school where he last attended, he was one of the most popular kids. I mean he had absolutely no problems. Socially, he’s a well-adjusted kid.”

As the participants asserted, 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 appreciate the schools for their 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 school 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 nonmilitary—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 participants said that the structured environment in military school appealed to them and/or they wanted their sons to be able to implement structure in their own lives. One parent revealed that:

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. So we debated it back and forth, and sent him to a military academy.

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, and 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 the military school experience. One stated:

What he does is up to him, and what he accomplishes is only equal to what he puts in. . . . 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 her son’s 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—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. . . . I want him to learn how to take care of himself.”

Ultimately, themes involving discipline, structure, responsibility, and 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."

A second 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." A third parent discussed college preparation and the military: "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 have a career in the army." Another parent offered the following perspective:

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 his goal, and I hope it will put him in good standing even if he decides to change his mind and he wants to go into a Florida university.

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

DISCUSSION

Parent Choice Based on Morals and/or Values

In narratives, parents addressed specific, overt reasons for selecting a military school instead of a traditional boarding school for their sons. Findings revealed a reiteration of central themes of academics,⁶⁹ prestige,⁷⁰ improved academic performance,⁷¹ social discipline,⁷² and improved behavior.⁷³ The essential dichotomy is that of academic achievement and socialization. Remarks revealed that some parents had negative perceptions about private, secular boarding schools, so they opted for a

military-styled school as an alternative. Some parents who had chosen a military school for their son had done so after sending him to and withdrawing him from a traditional boarding school. Specifically, these parents felt that traditional boarding schools failed to provide a morally sound environment for their sons. Such choices support the broad-based supposition that society prepares its children and its subsequent generations through education.⁷⁴ Participants exhibited a consistent behavior in that they displayed strong desires to instill moral practices similar to their own moral structures into their son's lives, thus perpetuating and preserving their own belief structure within an established social context.

Building on the work of Durkheim,⁷⁵ Neal⁷⁶ suggests that parents chose a school for their children due to a perceived shortcoming in the condition of current society. This applies to military schools, as well.⁷⁷ In issues of ethics and morality, especially sexual propriety, participants emphasized a need for education to reinforce conservative behavior, including marriage before cohabitation and/or premarital sexual relations. Schools and by extension their staffs were expected to act on behalf of parents⁷⁸ while instilling values of modesty, propriety, self-control, and abstinence. Additionally, some parents specifically indicated that they did not want their sons to even see girls at boarding schools, faculty and staff notwithstanding, or entertain overnight or late-night guests of the opposite sex at any time. The feelings expressed by the participants reflected a strong moral subtext and were similar to findings in studies related to reasons for parochial schooling.⁷⁹

Parent Choice Based on Structure

Participants indicated that they made a conscious choice of military schooling for their sons since such schools were able to provide a more structured, rigorous lifestyle. Furthermore, parents specifically stated that they felt that traditional boarding schools provided an environment that was too relaxed on a disciplinary/structural level and that private, nonmilitary boarding school freedom could potentially lead to a variety of negative behaviors. Some parents felt that a military school provided a simpler social lifestyle than did a traditional boarding school due to obvious lack of heterosexual interaction. The belief that military schools may provide a simpler life for students in comparison with traditional boarding schools is consistent with Kingston,⁸⁰ who asserts that life in boarding schools is not easy, and students in these (traditional boarding) schools face tremendous pressure to succeed because of the highly

structured academic curricula. Essentially, the parents of military school students asserted a general comfort with traditional American values, and they chose a school that reflected and taught those standards.

Parent Choice Based on a Desire to Remove Advantage

Several parents discussed their choice to send their sons to a military school on the specific grounds that in this type of school success would be based on personal merits and accomplishments. Parents who discussed this issue stated they specifically wanted to remove any elite status they may have attained, noting their sons should essentially fend for themselves. This finding is inconsistent with the literature regarding attendance at traditional boarding schools as a vehicle for the elite.⁸¹ Though Powell⁸² indicates that boarding schools have become exclusively devoted to societal and political upper class preservation, military boarding schools appear less so. The literature also indicates that traditional boarding schools foster an elite social structure designed to groom students for an elite life.⁸³ However, historically and presently, merit and work ethic supersede class privilege and social networking advantages.⁸⁴ A cyclical relationship emerges among schools that produce successful, well-positioned graduates and the school's desirability for the socially elite to perpetuate the results in their children.⁸⁵ The cycle is often self-perpetuating, self-governed, and closed.⁸⁶

Parent Choice Reflects Son's Desires and Perceived Needs

Participants generally did not view their decision to send their sons to military school as punitive. In fact, some parents had attended military boarding schools themselves. Intimately involved with the schools' inner workings, several expressed a wish to replicate the military experience for their sons. Others discussed their willingness and/or desire to allow their sons to be included in or to make the final school choice.⁸⁷ When asked about the desire to attend, most indicated that their sons answered yes. Such responses resonate with Recker and colleagues⁸⁸ who observe that today's students may have a greater role in the decision as to what school they attend. Because children often have a greater voice than they did in the past, their educational choices no longer lie solely with their parents.

Some participants indicated that they did not choose a military school for their sons due to behavioral problems or unique learning pathologies falling

outside of the typical range of the average school. Others explained that their sons exhibited behavioral problems that were better controlled at home, in public school, or in a nonmilitary school. On the other hand, some of the participants indicated they sent their sons to military school as a result of a pivotal event, noting that, at a certain point, their sons' behaviors had become so unacceptable that they felt there was no other choice but to send them to military school. These findings are not consistent with generally held perceptions that military schools house only poorly behaved or troubled students.⁸⁹ In addition, several parents explained that their sons were not sufficiently challenged in school before attending military school, which may have given rise to behavioral problems. Finally, some participants indicated that their sons were gifted, and they felt that a military school would provide a more robust and intellectually enriching environment.

Perceived Efficacy

Grades

A prevailing opinion among participants was displeasure with their children's grades; each one stated that the academic difficulty was due to 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, Stevans and Sessions⁹⁰ and Gahr⁹¹ assert that military schools provide motivation through peer pressure and note that students failing at military schools are often pressured into success by their peers in order to gain privilege for the group. In this setting, all members of the group must be successful in order for the group to gain privileges.⁹² Community pressure stresses both individual and group success. Additionally, parents discussed choosing a military school for their sons in order to instill in them certain traits, behaviors, or abilities. Such responses are consistent with the literature.⁹³ Gahr⁹⁴ found that ". . . military high schools operate on a winning formula: hard work, loyalty, a sense of community and individual purpose, and personal discipline." Establishing a connection among these seemingly different ideals is important to those parents who support the efficacy of military-style education.

Discipline

Parents, furthermore, discussed overt desires for their sons to live and learn 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.

Most 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.

Responsibility

Parents who sent their sons to a military school wanted them to learn a sense of responsibility. Many parents indicated that responsibility was crucial for successful education. They wanted their sons to be responsible for their own decisions, and 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 are consistent with Durkheim⁹⁵ and the "cultural literacy"⁹⁶ 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 of 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.⁹⁷

Military Tradition, Pedigree, and the Big WHY

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 instill traits more akin to a quality work ethic than to promoting advantage over others and membership in an elite segment of society.

Parents also desire for their sons to be prepared for college or for the next phase in their maturation, which may include a military choice.⁹⁸ Overall, responses were not overwhelmingly academic in nature. 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 not consistent with the literature on this topic as it relates to traditional boarding school attendance. Power, Whitty, Edwards, and Wigfall⁹⁹ find 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.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study support a variety of conclusions. The most compelling theme to emerge is the notion of parents choosing schools for internal moral reasons and the stark, strategic, yet counterintuitive notion of *not* perpetuating elite and class privilege. This study highlights the fact that parents who sent their sons to military schools had specific reasons for choosing military secondary boarding schools over traditional boarding schools, and they acted definitively. Many parents aspired to replicate the experience that they had in similar or, in many cases, the same institution. Participants did not base their decision on the elite status of the military school in most cases; familiarity and legacy were the important issues. Overall, school reputation was largely secondary. Some of the sons who attended military boarding schools chose to do so as opposed to their parents compelling them to do so under the strict recommendation of a previous school. For parents who chose military schools for their sons to instill certain traits in them, they generally did not do so because of serious disciplinary problems. However, in some cases, parents chose military schools for their sons because of their poor academic performance. Ultimately, all believed that a focus on responsibility and hard work would lead to school and future success.

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