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Beyond the Gates: Admissions in an Elite Schooling Context

**JAMIE PINE completed the requirements
for Honors in Education
May 2019**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Howard", written over a horizontal line.

Adam Howard
Professor of Education and Director of Education
Advisor

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Saltz", written over a horizontal line.

Laura Saltz
Associate Professor of American Studies
Reader

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Methods.....	14
Context.....	14
Data Collection.....	17
Data Analysis.....	21
Literature Review.....	22
Forms of Capital.....	22
Applying Bourdieu Across Cultures.....	22
Cultural Capital.....	24
Social Capital.....	25
Economic Capital.....	27
Admissions Processes in Elite Schools.....	27
Admissions Processes in Elite Latin American Schools.....	31
Narrative Findings.....	38
Forming Valuable Connections.....	38
The Elite Circuit.....	46
A Close(d) Community.....	55
Discussion.....	65
Speaking the Language: Cultural Capital.....	65
Building a Network: Social Capital.....	67
Buying Status: Economic Capital.....	69
Conclusion.....	73
References.....	80

Abstract

This project explores the ways in which the admissions process functions at an elite school in Santiago, Chile, The Croft School. The project focuses on the ways in which admissions procedures contribute to the reproduction of social classes, by only allowing the wealthy elite to have access to a prestigious education. In order to understand these structures of power, interviews were conducted with administrators and parents at the Croft School. These methods were used to analyze the administrators' view of the school community, their role within the larger Santiago community, and how an exclusive admissions process contributes to socioeconomic divides within the city. The results of this research reveal that the emphasis on connections, wealth, and prestige contribute to a homogenous school environment, where elite students are only spending time with members of their own social class. This greatly affects the ways in which the Croft community views themselves and their relationship to the greater community. In order for procedures to change, the administrators at Croft must evaluate their privileged standing within society, and recognize the ways in which their eliteness contributes to exclusivity. From here, they will be able to restructure the admissions process to accept a more diverse student body.

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Introduction

On a Saturday morning in October 2004, my parents told me that I would be visiting a new school. For the past five years, I had attended Lincoln School, a small, all-girls' Quaker school located on the East Side of Providence, Rhode Island. My two older siblings attended the Gordon School, an independent kindergarten through eighth grade school in East Providence. My parents, dissatisfied with the experience I was having at Lincoln, wanted me to follow in my siblings' footsteps by attending Gordon. My parents had the economic resources to send me to either school, and the promise of the tight-knit Gordon community, experiential learning opportunities, and close relationships with faculty was too enticing to pass up.

I arrived in the lobby of the Gordon School that following Monday, and the Director of Admissions quickly ushered me into her closet-sized office. I remember feeling nervous, uneasy about the changes that lay ahead. My mom stood by me, worried by my pale face and stoic expression, a contrast from my usual loud and exuberant self.

I remained quiet. I had a plan.

My clever, eight-year-old mind had predetermined that purposely failing the admissions test would be a surefire way to stay at Lincoln for third grade. I read passages about elephant behavior as the Director of Admissions asked me to comprehend and synthesize the information. I gave her all of the wrong answers, pretending not to understand. I scored less than 10% on this test; there was no chance the school would accept me. I had succeeded.

The Director of Admissions called my parents the following day to congratulate them on my acceptance to Gordon School.

In shock at my acceptance, I confessed this elaborate scheme to my parents. They spoke to me sternly, listing all of the reasons I should have tried on the test. I wonder if they knew that I would have been accepted regardless of my test score.

At eight years old, I did not understand the intricacies that went into admitting students into elite schools. I thought I would be accepted or denied based on my own merit; if I failed the test, I would not make the cut. This seemed incredibly obvious and straightforward to me.

My acceptance to Gordon was not determined based on my test score, but based on various forms of capital. My parents had preexisting relationships at Gordon—they knew the Head of School, nearly every faculty member and coach, and met with my siblings' advisors often. Looking back, I suppose, it is obvious that I was accepted. My family had been at Gordon long before I was born, and could pay the tuition fees without much issue. Having attended Gordon assemblies and concerts from the time I was born, I was known to administrators and faculty before I could even walk or talk. I had memorized each hallway and winding corridor of the Gordon School by the time I was four. I achieved high marks at Lincoln as a first and second grader, but above all else, my qualifications for admission were that my family possessed various forms of capital, as described by Pierre Bourdieu (1986).

Admissions processes in many elite schools place strong emphasis on cultural, economic, and social forms of capital. Bourdieu (1986) describes cultural capital as

knowledge (embodied state), educational qualifications (institutionalized state), and the accumulation of goods (objectified state). These forms of capital, as they are inherited over time, give way to other forms of capital, such as economic or social capital.

Economic capital refers to the economic background of a family—the ability to provide and obtain resources, as well as access educational opportunities. Finally, social capital refers to the establishment of social networks and interpersonal relations—within families, amongst educators and students, within social communities. According to Bourdieu, social capital is the “aggregate” of the former two types of capital (p. 7). In other words, it is cultural capital and economic capital that allow for an accumulation of social capital. This includes membership within elite communities where families attain “symbolic exchanges,” such as the knowledge of how to interact in a networking setting, or the obtainment of advantages based on a family name (p. 9).

The inheritance of these three forms of capital puts students and families at an advantage within the educational world and provide elite schooling access to a very specific population. Because elite private schools do not have a specific obligation to the state, they are able to create their own regulations within their admissions processes, thereby selecting those who fit their mold, and rejecting those who do not.

In 2005, Gordon School was considered one of the most elite independent schools in Rhode Island. The families attending Gordon in the early 2000s were primarily white and upper-middle class from the East Side of Providence and were products of centuries of “old money.” Despite my failed admissions examination, my family and I possessed numerous forms of capital that offered me advantages in the

admissions process. With both of my parents achieving a college degree—my dad having attended an elite private school himself—my family possessed pre-existing institutionalized capital. We grew up with books in our home, had access to educational television, and listened to audiobooks or CD recordings of multiplication facts during long car rides. My parents prioritized our education because we had the economic stability to focus on the quality of our learning. My family’s economic capital—having the ability to pay the tuition at Gordon—provided my siblings and me with further advantages in the admissions process. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my family and I held social capital within the Gordon community. My older sister first enrolled at Gordon in 1992, and by 2005, when I applied, my family had spent thirteen years forming close connections with faculty, staff, and administrators. My family was known throughout the school community, with my parents regularly attending sports games and assemblies, and establishing themselves within the greater school population.

Beyond Gordon, my family name provided my siblings and me with a high level of social capital within the state of Rhode Island. My father, a politician in the 1990s, was known throughout the state as the Attorney General of Rhode Island. My siblings and I, therefore, were recognized as well. When my sister started at Gordon, my dad was in his first term as Attorney General, and though my siblings’ attendance at the school came with the presence of a security detail, the school welcomed the opportunity to have a “high profile” family in their community. Though my dad had stepped down in 1999, the achievement of social capital still remained.

As I have grown up and become more cognizant of my privilege and the advantages it has offered me in my education, I have begun to think more critically about the ways in which forms of capital favor certain students over others. I have taken an interest in the ways that elite admissions processes reflect the greater structural limitations that exist for families of lower socioeconomic classes. I have spent time reflecting on my own college search process—which mostly consisted of elite liberal arts schools in New England—and the messages I received from these institutions. I have mulled over questions in my head, in search of answers. Why do families choose the schools that they do? Isn't the ability to choose an institution just a product of economic capital? What underlying assumptions or messages are present in the communication between schools and families? Is an elite education really just code for, "if you choose us, you will gain additional valuable forms of social capital"?

These questions became even more amplified as I took courses on privilege, education, and social justice at my own elite liberal arts school, Colby College, while simultaneously working in the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid. I spent my first two years giving tours to the families of prospective students in which I shared my experiences as a student-athlete, talked about unique research opportunities the school offers, and the breadth of academic and career offerings we promise. We use words such as "connections" and "prestigious." We flaunt prominent alumnae and disclose names of famous speakers that have come to campus.

Now, I work in the office as a senior admissions fellow, and I have seen various changes in the admissions processes which have made Colby more accessible to a wider

range of students. Over the past few years, Colby has changed their testing policies to no longer require standardized tests, removed the application fee and required written supplement, and launched The Colby Commitment, which offers grants to families who cannot pay full tuition, with no added loans. The college also launched the Fair Shot Fund which targets middle-class families and “[ensures] that talented students from families in the middle-income brackets will have access to Colby’s extraordinary educational opportunities” (Colby College, 2018). These initiatives have brought in a more diverse and talented array of applicants from across the socioeconomic spectrum. While this is a positive improvement, it has remained important for me to evaluate aspects of the admissions process through a critical lens, to understand the ways that the college still perpetuates elitism and advantages elite students.

As a senior admissions fellow, I deliver information sessions and conduct one-on-one conversations with prospective students. In the information session script, we flaunt our prestigious art program, selling Colby as the home to one of the “finest art museums in the country.” Names like Jackson Pollock, Zao Wou-Ki, Pablo Picasso, and Alex Katz are mentioned throughout the information session. The inclusion of these names in a college information session assumes that the audience already possesses a certain level of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). From the moment families step onto campus, we share information that will be understood by families with capital, providing them with an instant sense of connection to the community and its students. Circularly, access to the Colby Art Museum and exposure to these works of art promises the ability to attain a certain level of cultural capital upon completing a Colby education.

In the Colby Admissions Office, we flaunt partnerships that Colby has with world-renowned research facilities—such as the Jackson Laboratory or Bigelow Laboratory; we offer statistics about students pursuing graduate degrees at other elite institutions such as Harvard or Yale, and share anecdotes of alumnae, such as Pete Rouse, who worked as President Obama’s chief-of-staff, and the political impact and social standing he has achieved since Colby. These stories and statistics are flooded with underlying messages—we promise an interdisciplinary academic experience, but we also guarantee an accumulation of social and cultural capital. Samuel Bowles and Herb Gintis write in *Capitalist Schooling in America* (2002) that the purpose of schools, specifically elite schools, is to reproduce the social standing of its students and families. These anecdotes ensure that students who attend Colby will remain within the elite schooling “circuit,” by attending a respected graduate program, or at the very least, will have established meaningful connections with accomplished alumnae.

In both recognizing my own privilege in my admission to Gordon School and thinking critically about my role in the Colby Admissions Office, I have been led to question how, specifically, admissions processes at elite schools contribute to social class reproduction, not just in the United States, but around the world. I began to place these questions in a more global context during the fall of 2017, when I spent the semester studying in Santiago, Chile. I spent four months learning about the different educational systems in Santiago, seeing first-hand the intense economic segregation that exists within the schools, and the greater communities. It was in this semester that I was introduced to an elite school, The Croft School (pseudonym). I conducted an initial

interview with the Director of Admissions, and quickly began questioning if and how their process of selection—from the initial screening of families, to the extensive fees required, to the lack of financial aid offered—contribute to social class reproduction. For this project, I have continued my research and analysis of The Croft School.

I have decided on this specific institution, and Santiago as a location of research, because Chile is one of the most economically segregated countries in the world (Bellei, 2013). Because upper- and middle-class families have more access to resources, they are offered greater educational opportunities with their higher level of cultural capital and knowledge of the education system (Zucker, 2008). Therefore, many wealthy families move from the public schools to the private sector, “which usually [have] higher selection processes of students” (Hernandez et. al, 2015, p. 131). Families without resources “tend to be relegated” to public schools because they can not pay for private enrollment (p. 131). Therefore, schools begin to segregate along lines of social class, upholding and never wavering from the status quo.

My observations and interviews drove my research questions. I focused on the ways in which the processes of selection favor certain students and families over others. More specifically, I looked into how the admissions examinations are conducted, what the application process entails, what advantages are granted to alumnae or existing siblings at the school, and what, if any, learning support is offered to students who require outside help. Further, I explored the financial aid processes (or lack thereof) to determine how families are economically supported if they are unable to pay tuition fees. I asked questions about the school community, the ways in which Croft is perceived

at a local, national, and international level. I explored and evaluated the ways in which existing faculty and administrators view their own school community, what makes Croft such a desirable institution, and how all of these structures inherently favor the Chilean elite. Throughout my investigation, I have come to understand the ways in which this institution in Santiago is actively working to reproduce the social standings of elites.

Methods

Context

The country of Chile is situated between the Andes Mountains and Pacific Ocean, with a population of nearly 18 million. The country is home to beautiful mountain ranges, widely acclaimed literary scholars such as Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, and the driest desert in the world, San Pedro de Atacama. The Chilean economy is driven by copper exportation, producing more than one-third of the world's copper.

Today, Chile is run by a democratically elected president, Sebastián Piñera, after being ruled by a violent military dictator, Augusto Pinochet, throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The country has returned to a state of political and economic stability after being left divided amongst harsh political lines when Pinochet's reign ended in 1988. The current GDP is approximately \$277 billion, and the country is ranked as one of the top forty most developed countries in the world (Thomas White International, 2016). Still, there is prevalent economic inequality and segregation throughout the country, and more specifically, in the capital city of Santiago (Dockemdorff et. al, 2000). When taking the metro (Red Line) through Santiago, one will ride by impoverished sectors of the city—at Estación Pajaritos, for example, which has extremely high levels of unemployment and low levels of education (Dockemdorff et. al, 2000). Continuing down the Red Line, one will move toward “Sanhattan,” with modern skyscrapers, five-star hotels, and educated businesspeople. This intense residential segregation is also reflected in the educational system, with the majority of elite private schools located on the exterior of Santiago, closer to El Golf, and most underfunded, municipal schools concentrated in the center of the city.

The Croft School is located in La Reina, just ten minutes outside of “Sanhattan,” a nickname given to Santiago’s financial district. La Reina is ranked third in the city of Santiago for having the highest average household income. The Croft School was established in 1928 by John A.S. Jackson, an Anglo-Chilean and graduate of Cambridge University. He founded the school upon the English model of education, and today, the Croft curriculum remains completely bilingual, taught in both Spanish and English. There are over 2,000 students and 400 faculty members at Croft. The school is founded upon pillars of service, fairness, and well-roundedness. In the words of current school headmaster, The Croft School is “synonymous with quality and excellence.” Croft takes pride in its long-standing traditions, strong sense of community, and a commitment to helping their students “reach their highest standards.” School life is driven by athletics, service, and the arts. Participation in each of these sectors earns a student the status of an “all-rounder,” while maintaining a high status of achievement inside the classroom. The motto of Croft is “nunquam non paratus,” which translates to “never unprepared.” This motto bolsters the identity of excellence and high achievement that Croft prides itself on.

The academic program is divided into three sectors—Lower Prep, Upper Prep, and Senior. In Lower Prep, pupils, beginning at age five, engage in classroom activities designed to “develop all-rounded, enthusiastic, and confident personalities.” In Upper Prep, the classroom curriculum is “based on the National Curriculum of England and Wales, in accordance with Chilean educational requirements.” Literacy in English and Spanish is required and is viewed as “the bedrock of Upper Prep.” The Senior School

incorporates a national and international curriculum, preparing pupils for university admissions. The school prepares students to take the PSU, the Chilean university entrance exam, and students are expected to graduate with fluency in both English and Spanish.

The admissions process at The Croft School is highly selective, with new students accepted only up until the seventh grade. To apply for prekinder (ages 4-5), families are expected to fill out a survey which asks about nationality, personal information such as email, phone number, and last name, and six questions about the applicant's relation to the school. The survey asks the applicant to answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following statements (translated from Spanish):

1. You have a sibling at The Croft School
2. You have had or currently have a sibling or half-sibling at The Croft School
3. You are the child of an ex-student at The Croft School
4. You are the grandchild of an ex-student at The Croft School
5. You are the cousin of a student at The Croft School
6. You are the niece/nephew of an ex-student at The Croft School

To apply for kinder (the school's official name for kindergarten) through seventh grade, applicants are expected to submit a birth certificate, a photo, and a letter of reference from any family member who has attended Croft or is associated in any way. Once these materials are received, applicants and their families are invited for a formal interview. If the admissions office chooses to proceed with the application, the family is allowed to complete an online application and take a standardized admissions test. After

each of these steps are completed, the applicant will be informed of the admissions decision.

There are numerous fees required to apply. Each of the following fees are calculated in “Unidad de Fomento” which is a unit of account in Chile. For the purpose of this project, the fees have also been converted into United States dollars using an online conversion tool (CoinMill, 2018). In order to apply to The Croft School, families must submit a fee of 5 UF (approximately \$200 USD) that is non-refundable. Families owe 12 UF (approximately \$490 USD) to secure their position, if accepted to the school. Every student must pay a “membership fee” of 180 UF (approximately \$7,339 USD) before entering the school, and an annual tuition fee of 250 UF (approximately \$9,541 USD). To place this into a broader context, the average household income in La Reina is approximately \$42,000 per year. This is significantly higher than the average yearly income for families in Santiago, which is approximately \$30,000 per year. The Croft School has no form of financial aid or scholarships, giving way to homogeneity within the student body.

Data Collection

This project stems from a research project which began during my semester abroad in Santiago, Chile in the fall of 2017. There, I conducted an initial interview with the head of admissions at the Croft School. Bárbara Valdés, the Head of Admissions, has been working at the Croft School since 1989, after graduating from a private university in Santiago. Ms. Valdés began as a teacher at Croft and eventually worked her way up to Head of Infant House in 2007. After four years in that role, she assumed the role of

Head of Admissions and has been in this position ever since. Ms. Valdés oversees all admissions visits, conducts interviews with families, and serves as a member of the admissions committee, which accepts or denies each applicant. A member of the Croft community for over thirty years, Ms. Valdés holds the school and its values very close to her heart.

My interview with Ms. Valdés aimed to gain an overview of the admissions process, learn about the financial commitment of attending Croft, understand what types of students look at Croft, and what the school is looking for in a student. The interview lasted forty-five minutes and my questions were shaped by a larger research project being conducted by Adam Howard that is focused on elite schooling and privilege. The overarching themes of his project, designed to understand global citizenship education within elite schools, drove my individual research while abroad in Chile (Howard, 2018).

Ms. Valdés also provided me with various admissions materials, as if I was a prospective student myself. These helped explain what the process of applying to Croft might look like. I also went on a student-led tour of the school, similar to what a prospective family might see on their visit. I took photos of buildings and wrote down my observations about everything from the school uniforms to the ways I observed students interacting with one another. Gaining an understanding of the social atmosphere of the school community is essential to understanding the admissions process in a broader context (Fahey et. al, 2015).

During January 2019, I travelled to Santiago once more to further my research. While there, I spoke with the deputy headmaster, Marco Butler, the head of the senior pastoral school, Carla Aguilar, and a parent and alumnae of the Croft School, Claudia Torres. I also used interviews conducted by Adam Howard and his research assistants with the director of communications at the Croft School.

As deputy headmaster of the Croft School, Marco Butler works closely with the headmaster and the Board of Trustees of the Croft School. Mr. Butler was exposed to a wide range of cultures growing up having lived in France, Spain, Belgium, New Zealand, South Africa, and Rwanda before eventually settling in Chile. He attended university in Belgium, where he studied to become a journalist. He brings a unique perspective to the Croft School, having travelled the world—first, as a journalist, and later as the export manager of a wine company in New Zealand. He has worked at the Croft School since 2008, quickly climbing the administrative ranks. He began his teaching career as a science teacher for the six-year-olds, and was quickly promoted to the head of the science department. He then assumed the role as head of the primary school, followed by the head of the senior school, and finally, deputy headmaster.

Ms. Carla Aguilar has been at the Croft School for “almost all [of her] life.” At age five, she attended the “sister” school to Croft, during the time that Croft only accepted boys. In 1971, her school shut down, and the girls’ school merged with Croft, and has been co-educational ever since. After studying to become a physical education teacher, she returned to Croft to work in the sports department, where she worked mainly with female sports teams. She reflects on her career with pride, having been the only female

to serve as the head of the sports department. Now, she is the head of the pastoral school, acting as a support for the students, and occasionally a disciplinarian. Ms. Aguilar has watched her two daughters attend and graduate from Croft, and expresses great pride in the school's community.

Ms. Torres is a parent, former teacher, and alumnae of the Croft School. She comes from the largest family to ever attend the Croft School, with thirty-eight members of her extended family having graduated from Croft. Growing up in Los Condes, an elite section of the city, Ms. Torres attended Croft for her entire educational career. After studying at a university in Santiago, she worked as a preschool teacher at Croft for twenty years. During this time, her four children attended the Croft School. Like Ms. Aguilar, she regards the Croft community with an immense amount of pride, noting that all of her best friends are from her time at Croft. No longer a parent or teacher at the school, she looks forward to watching her grandchildren receive a Croft education someday.

In addition to gathering data through interviews, I spent three weeks in Santiago, re-acclimating myself with the city I had grown to know during my four-month study abroad experience in 2017. I took photos of The Croft School and the surrounding neighborhood. I spent time in physical spaces on the campus—walking through classrooms, community gathering spaces, rooms adorned with trophies, plaques dating back to the mid-twentieth century. I familiarized myself with the campus and facilities to help understand why families are so attracted and dedicated to The Croft School. To better understand the “Croft Spirit,” I also engaged with school materials such as

yearbooks, communications pamphlets, and information from their website about the Admissions and Tuition processes.

Data Analysis

To analyze data, I transcribed each interview and familiarized myself with the data. I also reviewed my literature review to understand my interviews within a more grounded context.

When writing qualitative reports, it is important to identify a list of themes to help focus the study. Because of this, I read through each transcribed interview to familiarize myself with the interviewees and get a better sense of the Croft School overall. I began by identifying “codes” for any consistent themes that appeared. I went line-by-line developing a list of recurring words and concepts, ending up with 40 initial codes. After the compilation of a coded list, I completed axial coding, where I looked for categories or concepts that emerged across all data sets (Strauss, 2003). This allowed me to collapse my list of 40 codes down to 20, based on the collection of similar codes. From there, I narrowed my findings down to 8 to focus my coding process solely on themes that closely pertained to my research questions. I identified the three most relevant themes—valuable connections, an elite circuit, and a close(d) community—all of which encapsulated the eight, broader codes.

Literature Review

Forms of Capital

Applying Bourdieu Across Cultures

Applying Pierre Bourdieu's theories of capital to elite schools, it becomes clear that students and families with greater access to resources, education, cultural goods, and finances are offered extreme advantages in admissions processes (Bourdieu, 1986). It is necessary to acknowledge that Bourdieu wrote his theory with a focus on the "socially dominant class" and educational system in France, and most of his theories, therefore, maintain a very Westernized focus (Bourdieu, 1986; Adkins et. al, 2017). Additionally, Bourdieu's work was published several decades ago. These two factors potentially present challenges when applying Bourdieu's theories to a present-day, global-South country such as Chile (Connell, 2007).

Several scholars have explored the relevance of Bourdieu's theories today. They have studied the ways in which his work can "travel" and remain applicable across cultures and contexts (Adkins et. al, 2017), while also acknowledging the limitations of this. Recently, more and more countries around the world have seen a rise in elite education as a result of increased globalization (Adkins et. al, 2017). Jane Kenway and Aaron Koh (2013) argue that because of this, Bourdieu's theories are still relevant, and they will continue to remain applicable across cultures so long as the structures of "economic and cultural power" are taken into consideration (p. 3). The question becomes, therefore, whether or not his theories are applicable in places where "global

mobility intersects with more embedded structures of class power,” given that Bourdieu did not originally take this into consideration (Adkins et. al, 2017, p. 31).

In order to successfully “travel” with Bourdieu’s theories (Kenway & Koh, 2013), one must employ a “Bourdieuian intersectional analysis” to understand specific contexts of race, gender, nationality, and class in the schools and countries in focus (Adkins et. al, 2017). It is then on the “traveller” to analyze the ways in which forms of capital function within that specific society (Adkins et. al, 2017).

For instance, Kenway and Koh studied an elite Singaporean school to demonstrate the relevance of Bourdieu’s work. This school is greatly influenced by Western culture, through the teaching of English, intense academic examinations, and the embrace of “western knowledge and technology” (Kenway & Koh, 2013, p. 280). While Kenway & Koh identify the limitations of their study, they note that because of these qualities, Bourdieu’s theories maintain relevance. By applying Bourdieu’s theories of capital, scholars such as Barr and Skribis (2009) are able to identify this elite Singaporean school as an “incubator of excellence,” categorizing it as place where “the brightest will go on to lead Singapore” (p. 282). The students who have the pre-existing capital required to enroll at this elite school are prepared to enter the workforce with high-power jobs and influence. They conclude that this elite school is a site of social class reproduction by fostering a sense of intense competition and a “winning” attitude among students (Kenway & Koh, 2013). Kenway and Koh’s argument that Bourdieu’s theories can, in fact, “travel” if cultural and economic context are taken into consideration, allow Bourdieu’s work to remain applicable in this study.

Cultural Capital

Students and families who possess higher levels of cultural, economic, and social capital are inherently advantaged in the world of elite schooling. Cultural capital can exist in the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized states (Bourdieu, 1986). In the embodied state, Bourdieu defines cultural capital as “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (p. 3). Embodied cultural capital is most often inherited from family or from societal influence. In the objectified state, cultural capital can be defined as “cultural goods,” such as the access to books, art, musical instruments, or technology. Exposure to these cultural objects allows for the development of “embodied” capital. For example, a student who has access to art will develop an inherent knowledge of how to act in an art museum by watching their parents or others, and will develop an appreciation for the cultural context of fine art. Finally, in the institutionalized state, cultural capital exists as “educational qualifications,” and functions under the presupposition of economic capital (p. 3).

Using a British elite school, Zimdars and colleagues (2009) argue that cultural capital leads to social advantages. An ability to participate in the “dominant culture” gives students tangible symbols of culture to relate with among their peer groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Zimdars et. al, 2009). Thomas C. Wilson (2002) explores the intersection of multiple forms of capital, using the example of athletic involvement. Athletics are central to the process of admissions as yet another way certain students are advantaged over another. Wilson (2002) argues, “sports involvement either as a participant or a spectator requires both money and leisure time, and the upper classes

have more of both” (p. 6). The ability to afford participation in certain activities almost always serves as an advantage to the elites. Playing sports gives elites access to elite spaces, thereby allowing them to gain cultural capital. In the case of admissions, cultural capital and athletics serves as a microcosm of intersecting of forms of capital and the advantages they offer within elite admissions.

Social Capital

Bourdieu defines social capital as the “possession of a durable network of...institutionalized relationships” that provides its members with symbolic “credentials” and access into a more elite social sphere (p. 9). Within the admissions process specifically, Zimdars et. al (2009) argue that families with greater social capital receive advantages because the elite educational system “assumes the possession of capital” (p. 3). Admissions offices judge students based on an assumed set of skills that only those with exposure to capital in the embodied or objectified state will have obtained such as the knowledge of certain manners, social practices, or communication styles. Kenway and Koh (2016) use an elite school in China to support their argument that “elite schools are limited to those with the financial and social capital to navigate the admissions process” (p. 52). Similarly, Zimdars et. al (2009) show that in a British school, admission to the community is rooted in “social class prejudice,” showing favoritism toward those who have preexisting memberships to private school communities. Alternatively, this school is shown to have a “corresponding bias” against applicants from state schools (Zimdars et. al, 2009). Bourdieu describes these

advantages as “symbolic profits,” that are only obtained through a close association with a particular social group or circle (Bourdieu, 1986).

Nan Lin (1999) bolsters the idea of “symbolic profits” by describing social capital as “investment in social relations with expected returns” (p. 471). A parent’s decision, for those financially capable, to send their children to private school is due in part to the unspoken guarantee that these schools provide a deep, elite social network (Lin, 1999). Avery et. al (2003) argue that elite schools inherently provide advantages to their students which in turn maintain the social status of elites by providing “prestigious networks” and “a clear path to success” through schooling (p. 5). Allan and Catts (2012) define this as “linking social capital,” or the establishment of connections between people with varying social powers (p. 4). This theory operates under the assumption that social connections are hierarchical (Moody & White, 2003) and that those in elite groups network with other elites to enhance their upward social mobility (Allan & Catts, 2012).

Sunhwa Lee and Mary C. Brinton (1996) exemplify this using an elite school in Japan, noting that the school “[provides] not only credentials but critical introductions in the job-search process” (p. 179). This cycle, which begins with the social capital advantageous to an elite school’s admissions process, follows the student throughout their schooling, and provides them with the connections necessary to find prestigious jobs. The cycle of reproduction, of both privilege and elitism, therefore, continues.

Economic Capital

Bourdieu's theories show a direct link between the accumulation of goods and the reproduction of social classes by looking at intergenerational economic theories and understanding the ways in which capital is transmitted from parents to children (Bourdieu, 1973; Smeeding et. al, 2011). Admissions processes at elite schools give advantages to students with familial connections, access to academia in the home, and the ability to pay for tutors (Kohn, 2000). Bourdieu argues that those with high economic capital are "endowed" with cultural capital due to financial access to cultural spaces (Bourdieu, 1984). Each form of capital, therefore, is inherently linked.

Annette Lareau (1987) argues that family economic background and access to education within the home allows for greater success in schools. Parents of higher social classes are more involved in their child's academic life, and therefore able to advocate for their children both in the admissions process and upon acceptance into the school. According to Abrams and Gibbs (2002), the idea of parental advocacy and the ability to make time to communicate with teachers on an intellectual level "poses barriers for [the participation of] working class and poor parents" (p. 385). The ability of parents to advocate for their children is dependent on their access to school, their ability to make time in their day to meet with teachers, and have time at home with their children to talk with them about their day—all situations that are typically unattainable for working-class parents who may work multiple jobs.

Using elite American universities as a case study, Daniel Golden (2007) argues that economic capital presents numerous advantages in the application process. Admissions processes at elite schools favor wealthy students (Lee & Brinton, 1996)

thereby creating a divide between wealthy and non-wealthy social groups (Golden, 2007). This contributes to social class reproduction in itself because those in privileged social groups are restricted to socializing amongst other elites. Students with familial connections are advantaged, while those without as much access to resources are left unconsidered.

Admissions Processes in Elite Schools

There is not extensive literature available regarding elite high school admissions, and we know from research on elite institutions that there is a heavier focus on admissions at the college level. It is still worth looking at this research because the school in focus is an internationally-renowned elite institution, therefore, this literature maintains applicability.

Admissions offices in elite schools inherently favor wealthy students with familial connections over those without the same levels of cultural, social, or economic capital. Daniel Golden (2007) profiles an elite university in the United States which has a group of alumni donors that form a “Committee on University Resources.” In order to become a member of this group, donors must give a minimum of \$1 million dollars. Benefits of this group include an advantage to children of wealthy donors who “flourish in a selection process that lacks conflict-of-interest rules and systematically favors the wealthy and well-connected” (p. 24). Admissions offices do not see advantages offered to children of donors as unfair, but rather as a positive way to ensure economic prosperity in the future. Lois Weis et. al (2014) reinforce this idea by defining the college admissions process as a “key site in the fight for economic and social advantage” (p. 13).

Those who grow up with the aforementioned forms of capital are advantaged in the process of elite admissions, which is designed to favor familial ties and wealth.

In order to accept wealthy applicants, however, the college must recruit in places where wealthy applicants exist (Golden, 2007). Elite prep schools are often the target audience for elite college recruitment. College counselors at elite prep schools, therefore, develop closer relationships with admissions counselors from prestigious colleges, and are better equipped to advocate on their student's behalf than counselors at large public schools (Golden, 2007). Howard et. al (2014) write that students at elite prep schools are "much more likely than others to learn about the details of the admissions process from well-informed individuals" (p. 12). Because those who work at elite prep schools are often graduates of elite universities themselves, they are able to advocate and prepare their students in a way that teachers at large, public high schools are unable to, due to differences in class size and a lack of economic resources. Golden (2007) states that some college admissions officials go so far as to "tip off prep schools in advance" about the specific qualifications they are looking for in an applicant (p. 59). This leads to unfair advantages within the admissions process.

Lois Weis et. al (2014) attributes the "pipeline" from elite high schools to elite colleges to the ability to pour money into standardized test preparation, parental pressure, a desire for children to succeed long-term, and interpersonal relationships between elite secondary schools and college admissions counselors. Weis et. al cite a statistic in which an elite school college counselor described a family who spent "\$7,500 already [on standardized test prep] and are prepared to spend \$1,500 more" (p. 88).

Parents like to focus on seemingly controllable aspects to ensure their child is put at the greatest advantage in the admissions process.

The parental pressure for long-term success begins in middle school, where parents make the “up front” investment to pay for an elite high school education, with the hope that it will advantage their child post-graduation (Weis et. al, 2014). They want their child to accumulate more social capital, maintaining their socioeconomic standing within society. Admission into an elite schools acts as a form of symbolic power—before even arriving on campus, stating the name of the school is enough to gain access into elite spaces (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010). This perpetuates cycles of inequality as “rich people want their children to be around other rich children” (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010). This leads to a homogenous school environment. While it is true that not every student at an elite school is rich, the ability to socialize with rich kids inadvertently presents them with social advantages (Howard, 2010).

The same sentiments apply to elite high school admissions. Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández recounts his own visit to an elite boarding school during which he was impressed by its fancy architecture and access to a wide breadth of academic resources (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). He writes, “no one arrives in the admissions office of an elite boarding school by accident” (p. 43). In fact, it is in the selection process itself, Gaztambide-Fernández argues, that students begin to define themselves by an elite identity. If they are admitted—though applicants never fully know *why* they are admitted to a school—students begin to develop a sense of elite identity. With their acceptance comes feelings of pride about being accepted to an exclusionary group

(Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Howard, et. al, 2014). Students, therefore, begin to identify with a sense of privilege, defined by Bob Pease (2006) as “systematically conferred advantages individuals enjoy by virtue of their membership in dominant groups with access to resources and institutional power that are beyond the common advantages of marginalised citizens” (p. 8). A development of this elite identity gives students something to buy into—they feel accomplished in their own right, which reflects positively on the school community as a whole.

Anna Mountford Zimdars (2016) writes that admissions is “part of the wider mission and purpose of the institution” (p. 29). Many elite schools look to quantify the success of the institution by measuring the symbolic power gained by alumni (Zimdars, 2016; Bourdieu, 1996). The success of each admitted applicant reflects positively on the admissions office. Powerful alumni of the school, therefore, are able to harness their power by advocating for current applicants. These advantages specifically come into play when an alumnus has a child going through the admissions process. Jerome Karabel (2005) writes, “the children of the culturally capitalised enjoy a massive advantage in the competition for admission and the children of families not so endowed find themselves effectively excluded from the race before it begins” (p. 556). In other words, many elite admissions processes are structurally designed to limit the access for those without connections. Golden (2007) explains this idea when he states, “legacy preference bolsters school traditions and rewards alumni for financial contributions” (p. 119). For example, at the University of Notre Dame each year, “between 21 and 24 percent of the freshmen class are alumni children” (p, 117). “Legacy preference,” as it

has come to be known, actively contributes to social class reproduction by providing a “form of insurance against a decline in educational status from one generation to the next” (p. 117). And, as this research has shown, educational status is almost always linked to socioeconomic status.

Students gaining access to elite education through “legacy preference” exploit the myth of meritocracy by focusing more centrally on an aristocratic worldview; one that favors those with social advantages. Jerome Karabel (2005) explores the idea that the “definition of ‘merit’ systematically favors the privileged over the disadvantaged” (p. 549). Merit, he argues, acts as a veil over society in which those who are able to define what “merit” means, “will almost invariably possess more of it ... and are generally able to ensure that the educational system will deem their children more meritorious” (p. 549). One likely feels inauthentic or undeserving to attribute accomplishments to connections, therefore “merit” has become a blanket statement that allows those with capital to feel more worthy of their own accomplishments. At the end of the day, their children will likely receive those advantages too.

While there is “apparent openness” in many admissions processes—by reducing some of the barriers that once made access to elite institutions nearly impossible for anyone with limited forms of capital—these structural changes solely act as a guise. Universities that present themselves as accessible only goes so far toward leveling admissions. The reality is that elite schools are “in truth a realistic possibility only for those [whose families] endow them with the type of cultural capital implicitly required for admission” (Karabel, 2005, p. 549; Meyer et. al, 2013; Zimdars, 2016). Regardless of

progressive steps on behalf of admissions offices to make their process more inclusive, it is those with possession of capital who will continue to be advantaged.

Admissions Processes in Elite Latin American Schools

The number of elite schools across Latin America is continuing to increase. In Chile, the switch to more a privatized education system began in the 1980s, during General Pinochet's dictatorship (Bernasconi, 2004). Andrés Bernasconi refers to the private education system in Chile as a "highly competitive market" and this has clearly translated to the ways in which schools conduct their admissions processes. With an oversight on behalf of the state, Latin American private schools have been able to craft their own processes of selection (Elacqua et. al, 2006; Holm-Nielsen et. al, 2005). Through extensive entrance exams or surging application fees, these processes are designed so that only a very small group of elite students will succeed (Ziegler, 2016; Levy, 1986).

Many elite schools in Latin America function under the influence of a "comparative existence," meaning from the very beginning, administrators and faculty set the precedent that elite schools are breeding grounds for success, where some will rise to the top and others will fall (Ziegler, 2016). This attitude is reinforced in admissions offices.

These private, subsidized schools employ what is known as "selection bias" (Somers et. al, 2004). Selection bias occurs when the requirements to apply favor one social group over another (Somers et. al, 2004). For example, students of higher socioeconomic classes are proven to score higher on standardized tests if they are able to

afford tutoring (Weis et. al, 2014). A study conducted by Varun Gauri (2004) shows that in Chile, “82 percent of students in private, fee-paying schools took exams in order to enroll” (p. 68). These tests, therefore, are a greater indication of socioeconomic status than of academic achievement. Sandra Ziegler (2016) uses an elite school in Buenos Aires, Argentina to exemplify the ways in which entrance exams contribute to selection bias in the admissions process. She believes that the implementation of these exams contribute to the formation of elites by evaluating their students based on “principles of meritocratic legitimacy” but positive standardized testing scores are often correlated with higher socio-economic incomes. They are not a measure of meritocratic legitimacy, therefore, but rather a measurement of economic success.

Daniel Levy (1986) writes about the selection bias employed by certain elite schools in Mexico. Mexico’s elite institutions make it clear that they “seek influence through quality not quantity,” and in most cases, this means only letting the most elite students through their doors (p. 167). Levy profiles one Mexican elite school in particular to argue that “choosing Mexico’s best prepared candidates means choosing disproportionately from privileged backgrounds” (p. 167). This begins the cycle of elite reproduction because most students at these elite high schools continue to employ their socioeconomic advantages which give them a “clear competitive edge” in the elite college admissions process as well (p. 167).

Selection bias can also be enacted by families, based on the role they play in choosing a school for their child. Gregory Elacqua (2009) writes about widening the “voucher system,” originally implemented in 1981 (Ramos, 2002), into the broader

educational world of Chile, in effort to extend opportunities for private schooling to those of lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This idea is born from the notion that parents who achieve high levels of education want the same for their children. More often than not, families attending “non voucher private schools” have “much higher incomes” and also have parents who attained higher degrees in schooling (Elacqua, 2006, p. 22). In other words, the families attending elite schools had higher forms of economic and social capital. Not only are families who have maintained higher educational degrees better equipped to prepare their students to do the same (Elacqua et. al, 2006), but they look at the student body and want their children to be surrounded by other upper-class, high-achieving students, which is consistent with what other scholars have found in other parts of the world (Somers et. al, 2004). This contributes to a homogenous student population, and this type of student body promises a culture of “academic intensity” and high academic achievement (Ziegler, 2016). Sandy Taut and Jorge Escobar (2012) contradict this idea, however. After conducting a series of qualitative studies, they found that a higher level of social diversity within the classroom contributed to better student performance (Taut & Escobar, 2012).

Are all families operating under the assumption that elite schools will provide their students with the social capital necessary to create prestigious social networks and form connections?

The idea that elite schools are better preparing their students for success is referred to by Marie Andréé Somers et. al (2004) as the “private school effect.” They describe this phenomenon as “the privatization schemes [which] assume that private

schools produce greater amounts of desirable outcomes” (p. 48). Many parents look at “peer group statistics” as an indication of promised success, by seeking out student bodies that reflect characteristics of their own children (Somers et. al, 2004). They seek the academic intensity that elite schools promise. Ziegler (2016) notes that in an elite school in Buenos Aires, the admissions offices views their entrance exams as “preparation” for the level of academic intensity that the school expects from their students, if accepted. She also notes that this dynamic and mindset—that the best will be accepted and the rest will not make it—is established upon applying and sets the tone for the atmosphere of this community, as is reflected in many other South American elite schools.

Selection bias on behalf of families is then reinforced by admissions offices, who often prioritize familial connections, the ability to pay in full, and high achievement on standardized tests. This creates a divide between those who are let in and those who must remain on the outside (Ziegler, 2016). About elite schooling in Buenos Aires, Ziegler articulates (translated from Spanish): “it is important that some ‘can enter’ as others ‘remain outside’ because the mechanisms of elimination are the privileged place of relations between the operation of the teaching system and the perpetuation of the structure of class relations” (p. 13). She argues that the exclusive nature inherently contributes to social class reproduction. Not only that, but elite schools depend on the “elimination” of lower socioeconomic classes to maintain their own status. This idea, of allowing some to enter and leaving others “outside” speaks to the insular community ideals that many elite schools possess.

The perpetuation of class inequalities within elite school admissions is also seen in Chile. It is often the most elite students who rise to the top. In Chile, educational and class stratification begins at the basic schooling level, where most lower-income students do not have access to quality educational opportunities. Therefore, they do not have the resources or support to access or fund a higher educational experience (Holm-Nielson et. al, 2005). Because of the limited access to elite education, and limited space within the elite schools themselves, Somers et. al, conclude that that private schools in Chile are more likely to exercise selective admissions processes (Somers et. al, 2004). Among these selective practices include “entrance exams, interviews, and minimum grade requirements” (Somers et. al, 2004, p. 68). Additionally, Elacqua et. al (2009) concluded that for-profit private schools in Santiago are more likely to locate themselves in neighborhoods with “high proportions of high school and college educated adults” (p. 31). Viewing this through a Bourdieusian lens, it becomes clear that higher educated adults are likely to use their cultural and economic capital to locate to wealthier neighborhoods, and seek elite levels of education for their children (Bourdieu, 1986; Elacqua et. al, 2009; Holm-Nielson et. al, 2005). The segregated student body in elite Chilean schools directly reflects the residential and economic segregation in Santiago.

Narrative Findings

Forming Valuable Connections

“We are a family school, so when you come with your first pupil and they’re accepted in at Croft, it’s almost 100% that the rest of your family is going to be accepted,” Ms. Aguilar stated, senior head of the pastoral school. This pattern, of families securing a permanent position within the community after the first child is accepted, is very common. Mr. Butler, deputy headmaster, explained, “out of approximately 150-160 children entering at age 4 turning 5, anything between 100 and 120 are siblings.” Out of these children, a large number have parents that attended Croft. This offers an immeasurable advantage, as described by Ms. Torres, parent and alumnae of the Croft School:

With my first kid, when we were applying, there were 600 children applying for 120 spots ... 60 girls and 60 boys. And we applied to, I think, four schools. And he wasn’t admitted to any of those schools, and he was on a waiting list at Croft and at Santiago College. And because I was an ex-girl, I went to talk to, at that moment, it was the head of the school and I went to talk to him. I told him, ‘I want my kid to be here.’ And as the list just moved on, he was in.

Her connections to the school community, having been a student herself, allowed her to speak with the admissions office and secure a spot for her child, despite his placement on the waiting list. Other administrators shared experiences similar to this one. Ms. Aguilar did not have to endure the formal interview process that all parents are required to go through. She described, “the thing is that, as I was an ‘Old Croftonian,’ and

because I work here, I did not have, really, the interview. Because it was not necessary. Because everyone knew me, and I was a teacher here.” Ms. Aguilar’s children had no problem being accepted to Croft. In fact, it was her own parental connections that led her to enroll at Croft in the first place.

Ms. Aguilar was admitted to Croft after spending a few years at a prestigious all girls’ school. Her mother also attended this school. She began, “my mother was sent to the [all girls’] school...it was the same as the Croft, but just a boarding school for girls.” She continued, “my mother had a very good experience [there]. It wasn’t a boarding school anymore when I was little or when I went to school. But my mother enrolled my sister and myself there, that’s why.” In 1971, Croft began accepting girls, and the all-girls’ boarding school became a “feeder” school into Croft. Ms. Aguilar had the advantage of attending the all-girls’ school, and being a legacy student at Croft made it easy for her to get in.

Ms. Aguilar continued with a reflection on Croft’s history of accepting families, siblings, and children of past students. “We are an inclusive school,” she stated. “We are a family school, so when you come with your first pupil and they’re accepted in at Croft, it’s almost 100% that the rest of your family is going to be accepted, unless it’s something very, very exceptional.” Mr. Butler bolstered this sentiment, “the vast majority of siblings are able to just come in tagging onto the older siblings that have been to the school and then the vast majority of the balance would be people with very strong connections with the community.” Ms. Torres’s family is a prime example of this,

with thirty-eight members of her extended family having attended Croft over the last ninety years.

Working as the head of admissions, Ms. Valdés held a slightly different perspective. While it is likely that siblings of current Croft students will be accepted, she recognizes that it is impossible to accept the children of *every* alumnus who applies. “You realize how difficult this is for us,” she began. “To [choose between] a former student and also one who is not connected to the school? It is very delicate and that is why we are very certain that we will not be able to choose all of the alumni.” With that said, there is certain criteria that alumni need to fit in order to be considered. Ms. Valdés explained:

The alumni—as you asked—the alumni, we consider ourselves because we obviously know that they went to our school. But not everyone is good after they graduate, when they go to university and work. We find the trajectory of that former student within the school, we see how committed they were, if they embodied the spirit of an all-rounder, had a spirit of service, sports—all of our values, and we see if there is congruence with what they are today, what the school is like today, and what that parent shows in their admissions form. And obviously by their dedication to the school, we give everyone the pass to continue in the process.

The Croft ensures that each alumni considered has represented the school in a positive way since they graduated. They evaluate the university attended, types of jobs held, and

social impact made. If they have not succeeded in these regards, it is likely that their child would not be considered.

The Foundation of the Croft School is adamant that there need to be new families accepted into the community every year. Mr. Butler explained, “[without] new families, the community becomes kind of a private club.” With no familial connections to Croft, new families must present a letter of recommendation from someone already in the Croft community. Mr. Butler continued, “the new families that come into Croft need to be very well recommended. So, it is highly likely that they are already at least partly have a foot in the Croft community otherwise they would not be highly recommended. It is because they know people within the Croft community.” This calls into question how “new” the new families really are. Ms. Valdés explained this same process from the perspective of the admissions office:

In the case that it is a new family, who do not have children at the school already, we also send a presentation letter format where they will have to look for someone who can present them to the Croft community. It can be a member of the ‘foundation,’ or of John Jackson, or a current parent, or alumnae. If the letter of presentation is good, it signifies that this is someone the school would want. It allows us to see who knows who or which aspects of the family are interesting to our educational project. It has to be said...well, the truth is, is that there is a profit with this family.

Because it is more difficult for new families to be accepted, the community depends on recommendations to ensure that the family is a strong fit. Just as they expect former

students to carry out Croft's values in their lives, the school seeks out unique qualities among new families. They are in search of something that is not already represented in the community. Ms. Valdés told me, "with the families that are not connected to the school, we consider all the admission forms and we see what that they can offer us, in some way, that allows the community to grow in knowledge, in cultural diversity, and that what they contribute that isn't already here—if they have something special." A letter of rejection from Croft is disappointing, given the opportunities accessible to students once admitted into the community. In fact, most families choose Croft because it allows student access to networking within an elite sphere and connections, both among peers and with the alumni community. Mr. Butler described Croft as "a highly desirable place to be." Ms. Torres stated, "what I know is that Croft is one of the most popular and the most, it's one of the best schools in Chile, we have to say it." Mr. Butler continued, "[especially] in the Chilean context, you know that you will be entering that school at the age of 5 and you will be leaving that school at 18 and you are going to have an excess of 100 of your schoolmates, of your age group, you are going to be pals for life, and that they are all going to be extremely well connected in the microcosm that is Chile. Hence, the high desirability of this school."

Croft ensures that its students have strong access to opportunities, in both university acceptance and seeking prestigious employment. When asking Ms. Torres if she believed that her students gained employment because of their Croft education, she responded:

I am sure about it. Because as my kids went into the many interviews for getting their jobs, it was more important what high school they went to than what university. Here in Chile, nowadays, it's more important the school they come from than the university. It's true. My kid, he's in his fifth year of being a lawyer, and we are very pleased because his boss came from Croft too.

Prior to graduation, the Croft community sets up workshops and events for students to connect with alumni who hold high power jobs. Ms. Aguilar described:

We asked former pupils that have jobs, for example, in business, that have companies or studies of law or works in hospitals or whatever, if they can have for a day a group of pupils, one or two, [to go] and [do] career practice ... just for them to see how it is [done]. And our former pupils are always open. We have all [of] our [students] going to different places, depending the career that they want, to spend the day doing the career, practicing the job that they want to have ... every time you ask a former pupil for something, you have it.

The logic behind these career oriented days, stems from the belief that current Croft students will should continue on a path of prestige, and hopefully send their own children to the school one days. Parents are also very active in the career process. Ms. Valdés described parents participating in talks or colloquiums concentrated around specific careers. The school also sets aside a set of days for students to visit universities dedicated to certain careers. This makes Croft an incredibly attractive educational option for families.

Mr. Butler related the motivation of some families to choose Croft, describing their mentalities: “I went to Croft simply to have these kinds of connections for the rest of my life and I am going to make loads of money thanks to it and I’m going to increase my power.” This is the mindset of many Croft families, especially given the economic state in Chile, when knowing other elite people is the key to maintaining elite status. Most of the social groups Croft students engage with are members of similar social classes, though Mr. Butler relayed his hope for Croft students to socialize in more heterogeneous settings:

Our young people tend to spend time with their own social class ... they have no trouble connecting within their own social sphere. They tend to go on holiday to the same places to Costa Rica, or places in the south like Foyun or Merica or in the winter to the skiing resorts and what we want to encourage is more opportunities for them to be in completely different settings, right?

This homogenous socialization makes sense for families who wish to maintain elite status and interact with other “influential families,” as Mr. Butler described families from Croft. On this topic, he further recounted:

Chile is a member of the OECD and it is the country with the highest discrepancy between the richest and the poorest. It is a community like Croft that represents—or that includes, more than representing—some of the most powerful, wealthiest families in the country with young people who are students who have access to opportunities that few people have access to in this country.

Croft brands itself as a community where connections are accessible and success is achievable. Ms. Valdés stated, “you will achieve success here. You will have success in whatever you choose—in the university...it will open doors...so in the background, this exists.” This community mentality, of achieving success, is what brings many former students back to teach there. They want to continue existing in a community that offers them opportunities, and it is the pre-existing connections that afford them teaching positions at the school. Ms. Aguilar described her journey to working at Croft, “I was lucky, because one of the teachers here left school ... left the P.E. sports department, and the headmaster at that time called me and said, ‘Do you want to come and work here?’ so I said, ‘Okay.’ I have been working here for, in March, it’s thirty-two years.” Her hiring did not involve an extensive application process, she did not have to seek out the job on her own; her connections gave her a distinct advantage and, ultimately, earned her the job.

These established connections often keep Croft graduates in Chile, as opposed to going overseas to the United States or Europe after graduation. Mr. Butler described, “If you go away from [these connections] at the moment when you're starting university, those bonds get even stronger with your fellow students because there might be 10 of you who have gone to [the same] med school...you become blood brothers for life, and you have to look after yourself and each other.”

It is this concept, of becoming “blood brothers,” that encourages Croft alumnae to send their children there, who will hopefully send *their* children there. The cycle continues as such. When asked if she hopes her grandchildren will attend Croft too, Ms.

Torres stated, “I think out of my four [children], three will [send their kids] to Croft...if they have the money. You have to have a lot of money to raise them at Croft.” She continued, “I would want my grandkids to go there...we were the biggest family that went to the school. It’s like...a tradition.” Ms. Aguilar supported these sentiments, describing the decision to send her own children to Croft:

I really wanted my children to enjoy this place as much as I enjoyed the school.

With my friends, with everybody...I told you that this community was very close, because we have a lot of Old Croftonians, and really, we create very strong bonds, and links between us. And I really wanted for them what I have.

The story that administrators, parents, faculty, and students tell about the Croft is one of strong connections and close ties to the community and one another. This is what has kept the same families in the school community for years, and what will hold them on the track to eliteness for years to come.

The Elite Circuit

“In Chile, English is the tool, really, to get out of poverty,” Ms. Aguilar shared. One of the most appealing aspects of the Croft School is the promise of learning English. Founded under the British National Curriculum, students at the Croft are expected to know some English before starting, but these language skills are greatly enhanced upon completing a Croft education. John Jackson founded the Croft School for families who desired a British education for their children, but did not want to send them overseas to England. The British influence further contributes to the eliteness of the Croft School. By graduation, Mr. Butler estimated that “99% of [Croft students] are capable of starting

university in Spanish or in English.” He continued, “[Knowing] English...is very useful. It is like having a car so that you can go from one place to another.”

The knowledge of the English language allows students to move along on a track of eliteness, gaining access to opportunities, jobs, and connections. Ms. Valdés supported this idea, “more than anything, learning English allows students to relate to people outside the limits of the country or outside of South America.” For Ms. Torres, the English curriculum was the reason she wanted her own children to attend Croft. “English first,” she said. “[Croft] has *very* good English.” Learning English helped her children attain prestigious jobs. Her son, in his fifth year of practicing law, got his job after his boss “gave him some English stuff to work with.” With the ability to show off his English abilities, he secured the job, and has been working in law ever since. Ms. Aguilar’s son shared a similar experience. Her son, who works in finance and investments, is “in a better position at work...because of English.” Commenting on the advantages that learning English provides, Mr. Butler stated:

Learning English opens so many doors. The difference between a Japanese businessman who knocks on someone's door in New York speaking English or not speaking English, the difference is immense. The importance of knowing English and being able to communicate effectively in English or being able to do business in English or being able to go to a conference [in the United States] ... we have many parents [at Croft] who have done post-graduate degrees in the United States, more and more going to live in the United States, because they get

sent by [their] companies and they go and live in the States and then they come back to Chile to gain more expertise, more experience.

The concept of gaining “more expertise, more experience,” is at the root of a Croft education. They stress this idea through the concept of being an “all-rounder.”

According to the Croft School website, the “all-rounder concept is linked to the renaissance ideal of an integrated, holistic education, where the mental, physical, social, and moral coalesce to give balance and enhance individual growth.” When asked what it means to be an “all-rounder,” each interviewee responded slightly differently. For Ms. Torres, all-roundedness means “fair play and [teamwork].” She continued, “[starting] in prekindergarten, [all-roundedness] is what you aim for.” Ms. Aguilar described being an all-rounder as being someone who “[does] a bit of everything ... they not only come and work academically but do sports and practice the arts.” She saw these “[bits] of everything” playing out in her own children’s lives—all of which are Croft graduates:

[My children] don’t do only [one thing], they can move in a lot of areas, you see? My kids, the ones that are working—I have two working and one is married already—so really in their lives, they combine their work with sports with family ... with a bit of, if you need to go and help in someplace, you know they’re open to do a lot of things. They’re open, they don’t stay with one thing or only work, they need to do more things in their life to feel more complete, I think.

On all-roundedness, Mr. Butler shared:

One expectation is for all pupils to aspire to be actively engaged in sport, in academics—which is by default practically—because you have to come to school

and come to class, [participate] in the arts, and in service. All that [works] toward developing what we call a ‘Croftonian profile.’ So the aim is, explaining the expectation that we have and the energy that we put in, is so that the young people who leave this school are people who are going to demonstrate an all-rounded attitude to life ... but they are also going to be recognizable as people.

Despite it seeming like all-rounders must possess skills in every facet of life, Mr. Butler also noted:

Sometimes there is the perception that [an all-rounder] is someone who is good at everything, but in reality it is not that. It is being an all-rounder more in the humanistic perspective, like Leonardo Da Vinci...[it is] making connections between things and once you start making connections between things, we are in a state of interbeing.

Each Croft student exists in a state of interbeing, a singular unit tied together through experiences of eliteness. These shared experiences continue well beyond graduation. At Croft, each student strives for excellence. Though learning English grants Croft families access to opportunities in the United States, the majority of Croft students remain in Chile after graduation. To explain this phenomenon, Ms. Aguilar stated, “English is the most important tool to succeed here in Chile. If you have the English, [there are more] possibilities, completely.” Ms. Valdés continued, “the majority of our students [stay] in Chile [after graduation]. They go to private universities.”

Mr. Butler attributed this to the pragmatic advantages of pursuing a career in Chile. He explained, “Because many of our students have been doing [professional]

qualifications—and part of the qualification is the certification to be able to practice that profession in the country...for instance, if I want to be a doctor, a medical doctor, a general practitioner or a surgeon here in Chile, there is not use for me going to the United States because then when I come back here, they will say ‘sorry, you can work in the United States but you cannot work here.’”

Ms. Aguilar continued, discussing the preparation that goes into gaining admission to a private university, “all [Croft students] want to go to a good university so they need very high scores on the PSU. The higher scores you have...the more emblematic university, if you want to put it that way.” Often times, parents question why their child needs to take the GCE Advanced Level examinations or the Cambridge IGCSE if their child is not planning on studying overseas. To this, Mr. Butler pointed out, “you have to look at what skills they are developing. By being able to have that depth in the command of two languages—and there is plenty of research that shows that learning music or learning a second language increases the potential of your brain and hopefully of your mind as well—but of your brain to start with...[you have] access to knowledge, tradition, culture, access to people, access to a curriculum.” Despite historic trends of Croft students remaining in Chile after graduation, however, Mr. Butler explained that students, as of recent, are beginning to explore beyond South America. He stated:

Our pupils have broader minds than they might have had in the past so they are much more open to other careers...they know that there is another world out there instead of just doing engineering at La Católica. Some are interested in

Neuroscience and have heard [about an] amazing neuroscience program at Yale [University] or have heard of this environmental science program in Colorado and so they hear about these things because of social media which allows them to have access to lots more information than they did a few years ago. Their world is much much bigger than just a few years ago.

The Croft School adequately prepares its students to excel in advanced university programs. When asked about the types of university preparation available to students, Ms. Valdés immediately emphasized, “A lot. A lot.” She continued:

The truth is, the students prepare for the A-levels for the University of Cambridge. It is demanding, we have a custom class in the school, there are workshops for the PSU. The children have a lot of essays to write, there are good programs. They have tutors that ask them how it’s going, how the studying is going...there is support. But there can always be more. But it’s better than nothing and we recognize that many students are used to this and are organized. Even though they have a hard curriculum, if they prepare well, if we prepare them well, they will be good university students.

According to Mr. Butler, this type of preparation pays off for its students. “Our top students are [the] top students in the world,” he began. “Our top 5 students are applying to Yale [University], we have a girl who got into MIT. It is really right at the top there. And then you have a number who are still aspiring to go to very, very good schools. One wants to get into Dartmouth [College], one wants to go to Boston College, we have a lot!” Mr. Butler is cognizant of the pressure this builds within the community, however. He

noted some of the extensive pressures students face. “Academic results, sporting results, the ability to play the piano,” he began. “All of this, we inevitably, as a school, contribute to that.” He continued, “come to our school and you can end up at Yale or MIT! All that is feeding [into] a pressure cooker in an environment where we have a lot of other points of pressure.” Those who have received a Croft education or have witnessed their children graduate from the school, do not share in Mr. Butler’s sentiments. They see an elite future of success and excellence.

Ms. Valdés discussed the type of careers students go on to pursue, “many go onto pursue careers in science and math, many do engineering, medicine, and also human rights...some are journalists.” Ms. Aguilar responded similarly, “Engineering. Engineering, law, some medicine..but...maybe 60% [civil engineering and business]...[also] law, architecture, physical [therapy].”

Regardless of the end results, Croft students are groomed for success starting from a very early age. Many Croft parents make intentional choices for their child’s education and future even before they are old enough to attend school. For each of them, the end goal is a prestigious university and well-paying job. For Ms. Aguilar, she decided to enroll her children in a “jardín”—or “nursery,” in English—that was associated with Croft. She stated:

At age two, before they came to school at age four, I took them to the jardín infantil, I don’t know how you say that [in English]. It’s at the other side of Principe de Gales, up the road. You walk 20 meters and you’re there. Really, I thought that it was a good jardín and I think it was ... if you want to [ask] me,

[did] you prepare them [for Croft]? Yes. I did the nursery here [at Croft]. I wouldn't have thought of leaving my children at home, not having some kind of...[not] being assimilated to come and to do whatever drawings or whatever they ask them to do in admissions. You see?

This type of preparation for the future is common, and often seen as necessary, given the competitive admissions process. Ms. Torres shared her anxieties when her first child applied to Croft as one of “600 children applying for just 120 spots.” Ms. Valdés added that most Croft families are “in general, professional families.” They want the same level of professionalism for their children in the future. For them, this begins with a Croft education. Ms. Valdés continued:

We have an educational project that is very orderly, organized, and we produce good results. And all of the parents want this for their children. I believe we are in a moment in which we are all looking for this. And economically, in [Chile], there are a lot of people who can pay—people who before, couldn't pay for private school. And so people who can't find good quality [public] schools, will look at private schools. But some schools are very expensive.

Because the Croft is a very prestigious school, the profiles of the families that attend are very homogenous. This puts families on an elite track which not only guides their educational life, but their social and personal lives as well. Mr. Butler noted, “because our young people tend to spend time with their own social class and it is not unique to Croft, it tends to be quite universal. And so, our students tend to hang out with student from Croft or students from other schools that are similar to Croft. They might hang out

with students from Santiago College, or from Craig House.” In effort to interact with people outside of their own socioeconomic class, Croft emphasizes the importance of service. A “spirit of service” is one of the four pillars of their educational mission. Ms. Aguilar described the students’ engagement with the community:

We have a group of our pupils that [go] and support academically pupils from unprivileged schools from this area. We [chose] this area to go and help ... because we think that we have to give back all the things that we do have and all the, the good practice of our teachers, our members of staff so the things that they receive as pupils, they have to go and give back in this area, in this community. They go once a week to those different schools...they support them in Spanish, in math, and in one of the schools they help them in English as well...they do sports clinics, of football, or basketball.

To emphasize the spirit of service, Mr. Butler noted, “if you are not in a religious school, service tends to be left behind, but here it is kind of a central pillar...and you think of what it is meant to develop in our students—I believe that it does to a large degree, [develop] what we call an all-rounder.” Part of being an all-rounder, in this context, means achieving a certain level of recognition for their service. Ms. Aguilar commented:

Last year the mayor of the community, of the *Municipalidad de la Reina*, invited us, and with all the pupils involved, to the mayor’s house for a tea, to share experiences and to ask us how was our work and to share experiences, really. So that was very nice, and I think that we are showing to the community—and I’m sorry to be telling you all this story—[but it’s] for you to understand, we want for

the community to have a very good idea of what we are and very good perspective, because we want to help the community.

Mr. Butler attributes the spirit of service to the school's British roots. He declared:

There is a kind of English, or British if you will, [that] is kind of hard to define.

But something that comes from Britain which has to do with the concept of being a gentleman or being a lady in the sense of...being someone who has access to a number of opportunities who is going to give back, not just take but give back to the social context in which they are immersed.

Because Croft is such a prestigious institution, the surrounding community often holds hostile feelings toward its eliteness. To combat these feelings, the school stresses the importance of serving the community. Ms. Aguilar finished her thoughts on this topic by stating, "I don't know how they perceive us, but they know us. Nationally, we're perceived as, I think, a school that generates a lot of leaders in the country." A disregard for community perception, and an emphasis on being known, defines the exclusive nature of the Croft community, and is what maintains the social status of its elite members.

A Close(d) Community

"There is no doubt that people from the outside world would be thinking of Croft as something that is just in a different world," Mr. Butler explained. This dichotomy between the inside world and outside world is reflected in both the physical location of the school, and in the statements of its members. When approaching the Croft School, your eye is immediately drawn to the vast green landscape, and black metal fence which

surrounds its buildings. Approaching the front entrance, you are greeted by a security detail, whose job is to screen visitors for proper identification and ensure that they have a scheduled appointment with a member of the school community. They issue visitor tags, require a sign-in process, and promptly close the gate behind you. Ms. Torres describes the school as “a big, nice school.” She continues, “you won’t get that anywhere. The rugby pitch, the hockey pitch. You won’t find that at other schools. Some schools have them, but not inside the school.” This is one of the factors that makes the Croft School so appealing to the Chilean elite. In the backyard of the school is one of the most exclusive country clubs in all of Santiago. Many members of the Croft School are also members of this club. Mr. Butler commented on the proximity to the country club, upon seeing it for the first time:

I was driving along [the road] and thought, ‘What a beautiful park! This is amazing!’ And I could already imagine myself going for walks in the park and thinking of how amazing this area was and the lady driving told me that it was a golf course. And that it was part of this very private and exclusive golf club so when you look at La Reina from above, on Google Earth, you see this beautiful green area and it is all private and not only all private but very, very exclusive. And then Croft is part of that so in the context of Chile, it was like how could we possibly be well-regarded by others? You know what I mean?

Ms. Torres also shared her thoughts on the proximity of the country club. She stated, “you have everything inside the school. You don’t have to go out to get anything. And you have the country club—if you need more things, you just go to the country club!”

Croft members are not required to be part of the country club, but it is a choice that each family does not take lightly. Mr. Butler laughed when speaking about the decision to join the country club, referring to it as “a luxury problem.”

The contrast between the inside world and outside world is seen each morning and afternoon. Multiple members of the Croft administration referenced the traffic that clogs the streets of La Reina each morning. Ms. Aguilar shared, “Sometimes, our parents park everywhere, block the entrance. ‘Oh, again! The parents of Croft!’ In those kind of things...I think that we’re a bit of a pain because we produce a lot of traffic jams.” Mr. Butler echoed this sentiment. “[Families] will be arriving in the last minute and because they do not want their child arriving late to school, [they] will park on someone's lawn...so in that sense, I think the immediate neighborhood would [have] mixed feelings [about us].”

These traffic jams exist because there is no form of public bussing system that brings students to Croft in the morning. Each family must rely on their own means of transportation to bring their children to school. Ms. Torres recalled that when she taught at Croft, “[only] one or two children came by a bus.” The lack of public transportation paired with the locations where most of the Croft families lives make it so each Croft family needs access to their own vehicle. Ms. Valdés noted that the majority of Croft families come from Las Condes, Lo Barnechea, Providencia, and Vitacura. Some families live in La Reina but this area “does not have easy access to neighborhoods, so families are not comfortable living there.” The aforementioned neighborhoods make up

the four wealthiest municipalities in Santiago. This, in itself, limits the scope of who has access to the Croft community.

The insular nature of the campus location is reflected in the opinions of the community, as told by a few of its members. When asked about the community at the Croft, Ms. Aguilar stated:

The community at the Croft, I think...is a very [solid] community, a very close community in a way. It's not that we are not open, but really the links that we make as pupils and then parents....because we have a lot of old Croft students as parents here, so everybody speaks the same language, the community is very close. Because, as I said, everybody speaks the same language, we move with the same codes, so it's like very close. It's a very close community.

Ms. Torres shared these sentiments, which is what led her to spend the majority of her life as an active member of the Croft community. She reflected:

Well, some people say it's a very 'close' community, that we don't open a lot. But as I said, I had a lot of friends from Croft...my mates. And now I have friends working at Croft, that I worked with. And it's like my home. I felt like I was doing what I've been doing for my whole life. I've been at school for longer than I've been married with my husband! Working at Croft, I think, is a very good job.

The...ambiente...the environment. With the other teachers, with your boss— These relationships and devotion to the school are what support the strong school community and sense of pride. Ms. Torres continued describing the community, summing up its exclusive nature very succinctly. “I think it's really a close community,”

she began. “It’s very difficult to get in if you’re not part of it. But it’s because you have many things in common that other people don’t have.”

Many outsiders accuse Croft students of “living in a bubble,” as Mr. Butler described. He noted that the physical location of Croft does not lend easy access to downtown Santiago, where most of the impoverished communities are concentrated. While some service projects require students to travel to different parts of the city, Mr. Butler commented on the physical isolation of Croft. He explained:

It really is quite striking when we take our young children downtown...we do a trip every year down to Plaza de Armas and La Moneda and the vast majority of the students had never been downtown but they had been to all sorts of other places. They had been to Disneyland, and to Miami, to New York, but never downtown.

This is where much of the criticism that Croft students live in a bubble, stems from. Ms. Aguilar shared similar experiences, but disagreed with the aforementioned assumptions. “We are used to receiving that criticism,” she began. “Like you live in the bubble! You don’t know what’s happening, go and see the reality. But we do, and really, our pupils say, we do, we do know what’s happening.” Those on the outside, however, would likely stand firmly against her statement. It was easier for some faculty members than others to imagine seeing the school from the outside. Ms. Aguilar stated, “I have never been outside of the school, so for me, it’s very difficult to be objective from the school. For me, my heart is here.”

Mr. Butler, having been at the school for significantly less time, put himself on the outside and imagined what it might feel like, asking the question, “Wouldn't it be amazing if I could be part of that world?” He argued that many people view Croft School as an unattainable goal, due to the restrictions in access to the school. For example, the school does not offer any form of financial assistance to families. When asked why, Ms. Valdés replied, “in this moment, there are scholarships for very few families, like if a parent loses a job, or an extreme situation like that. But we are not a school that has....sponsors...in a way...to pay for school. The school is not going that way. It is not part of our educational project.” Ms. Aguilar felt uncomfortable upon the mention of the term “financial aid,” quickly shutting the question down. “I don't know if I can say this. Can I not answer this question?” she asked.

The financial commitment goes far beyond the fee to enroll in the school. Mr Packer explained, “you know you have to put your children in a good school and you have to pay the school fees and there is the whole lifestyle, the tax to it. You know, if your kids are over 17 and they're hanging out with their mates and [in order] to be part of that group, they go off and they go to the beach and they are renting a beach house...you know. All of the sudden it goes well beyond just paying the school fees.” In order to fit in socially, access to finances is often required.

The social aspect of the school is something administrators take into great consideration. In fact, it is one of the reasons that the admissions office stops accepting students after seventh básico, or age thirteen. Reflecting on the admissions process, Ms. Valdés stated:

When you enter in the middle, like octavo básico, students may feel left out of the codes of how the school functions. They will not understand a lot about how we function. The difference in the US, is that more kids change schools. Here, no. Here, you generally go through the same school for your entire career. Then to overcome that—because in the end, the academic part you can learn...with private tutoring, we all can learn. But the emotional part—the part of the traditions, the behavior expected, is what is lost when the student is not accustomed to the system. It is a very traditional system, very organized, very strict deep down, in many people's eyes.

The influence of the “traditional system” on the social aspect of the school continues far beyond graduation. Ms. Torres, reflecting on the alumni community, shared that the Croft School has been working on establishing social houses. She said:

[There is the] educational house, the architectural house...they invite all of the ex-students to a dinner where they can...relate...with other ex-boys or ex-girls doing the same thing. And we have a club. The Old Boys club, where they play rugby or hockey. There are lots of games and everyone goes. And you recognize your old boys and old girls whenever you see them.

There is an expectation within the community to remain connected and close far beyond graduation. The Croft School prides itself on its intergenerationality, with many current students being the children and grandchildren of alumni. Ms. Torres shared, “there's a lot of ex-Croft working here, so you know many people. My boss was my teacher when I was at school! That's it. That's what I feel. I am at home.” She continued,

sharing the close-knit relationships that her own children developed at Croft. “I still have all of their friends at my home during the holidays. They come—four, five, or six of them. We are friends with their parents, even if they haven’t been at the Croft [themselves]...some of the parents are not ex-boys or ex-girls, but they get into the community and we’ve been friends since [the kids] were in kinder. So it’s not that we are *so close* that we don’t let others in, but only if you’re part of it.”

This exclusive but tight-knit nature comes as no surprise given the very selective admissions process—after being accepted to this prestigious school, students, parents, and alumnae do not want to lose membership to the exclusive community they have been allowed into. Ms. Valdés, in explaining the admissions process, harps on four points of evaluation. Students are tested in four areas: language comprehension, ability to concentrate, motor skills and hand-eye coordination, and ability to socialize. Their acceptance into the school is dependent on their ability to speak English or whether or not they can focus for long periods of time. Their hand-eye coordination is tested because, according to Ms. Valdés, “[the children] will be acquiring new skills. We want to see if they can hold a pencil, or arrange elements to create a drawing or graphic.” Further, the emphasis on sports in the Croft community requires students to have strong coordination skills. As Ms. Aguilar stated, “the transmission of values that kids get through sports, here it’s very, very important.”

In terms of ability to socialize, they look for children with strong behavioral skills, so as not to distract other members of the class. Ms. Valdés explained that this is part of their educational project, because most activities for younger kids involve sharing and

listening in some regard. The necessity to have strong motor skills is also deeply rooted in the intense sports culture that exists at Croft. Mr. Butler expressed concerns with this culture and the exclusive nature of many of Croft's admissions policies. He stated:

I would say more a school with such privileges—or who caters for populations with such privilege—like the Croft School...I think the education system in Chile as whole needs to be much more inclusive but more so, the private schools. and this is something that is lined with admissions. I think there have been cases here where maybe the third child or the fourth child has had some kind of disability or some kind of special need and required specific support and it's the parents who have come to realize that this is not the right place. Because sports are huge at this school. So, if you are constantly the one child who could never participate in anything at all, and you are the only one, if you have 20 people in a wheelchair but if you have just one, that can be absolute hell for that person.

Having strong motor skills as a prerequisite for acceptance into the school limits the scope of students they look at. Students with behavioral, mental, or physical challenges are automatically ruled out. The one exception comes when accepting siblings of current Croft students. Ms. Valdés explained:

If the child has a sibling [at the school] but is not mature in a certain area, if we accept them, it is with a commitment that the parents will support them by finding them a specialist. Sometimes there are different specialists who help with the development of concentration or learning or even socialization. So there is the

possibility that all of the siblings remain at the school because the family can support them with an outside person.

Finding the support of a specialist, however, is dependent on having the necessary finances to pay for one. Because of the financial burden this places on families, it limits the number of families who can access these resources—requiring that they pay for the school fees and any additional fees that a specialist charges. This, in addition to the steep financial commitment required to attend the Croft School, makes it so only the wealthiest, most well-connected families can attain membership.

Discussion

By placing the narratives of each interviewee in conversation with Pierre Bourdieu's *Forms of Capital*, it becomes clear that each advantage offered to Croft students, families, and alumnae are the result of cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital. The "accumulation" of each form of capital allows Croftonians to maintain their social status within the greater Chilean social hierarchy. By applying a Bourdieusian lens, we can see that the Croft School is sustained by a privileged identity, an exclusive admissions process, and a sense of eliteness and entitlement which permeates the school community.

Speaking the Language: Cultural Capital

According to Bourdieu, the more capital one accumulates, the higher one will be regarded in society (Bourdieu, 1986). At Croft, students arrive on campus already possessing various forms of cultural capital. They come equipped with the language skills and mannerisms needed to succeed in an elite environment. With many Croft families belonging to the neighboring country club, parents and students understand the social codes needed to interact in elite spaces. Pierre Bourdieu defines this intrinsic knowledge as "habitus," or the dispositions and outlooks that have been shaped by class position (Bourdieu, 1996). Students learn how to act at a dinner party, speak properly and confidently with adults, or dress for fancy occasions. Because a large percentage of students begin at Croft in Kinder, the embodied cultural capital they possess is likely subconscious and unrecognized. It is most often accumulated from parents or societal influences. The ability of a five-year-old to behave properly in an admissions

examination or speak proficient English, for example, are forms of cultural capital that are transmitted from elite parents to young children before the student is even admitted to Croft. Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) states that families do not enter the admissions office of an elite school “by accident” (p. 43). With this in mind, it is clear that prospective Croft families feel confident enough in their high social status to bring their child into an elite educational space to begin with.

Bourdieu’s idea of “habitus” is embodied in the “all-rounder” at Croft. Though each interviewee defined this term differently, they all viewed being an all-rounder as something that permeates every aspect of one’s being. Like cultural capital, all-roundedness cannot be easily quantified, but rather exists as a state of being. Further, achieving the status of being an all-rounder is a distinguishing factor of a Croft education. It informs a student’s outlook and trajectory for the future.

Discussions about the future begin very early at Croft. The acceptance into one elite space inherently grants access to others, setting Croft students up for success given the status associated with a Croft diploma. Howard & Gaztambide-Fernández (2010) discuss elite schools as forms of capital as its own entity. Because Latin American elite admissions are designed to support a very small population of elite students (Bernasconi, 2004), Croft families are within a small group of Chilean elites who quickly rise to power in the workforce. As parents of the Croft School shared, their children have pursued careers in everything from engineering to medicine to law. Their eliteness combined with a fluency in English grants access to high-power and high paying careers. Marie Andree Somers et. al (2004) describe this as the “private school effect,” or the

assumption that private institutions produce more “desirable outcomes” (p. 48). Croft families would argue that the ability to speak English inherently produces desirable outcomes for students.

The need to possess a certain level of English proficiency prior to Kinder at Croft is an example of an institutionalized form of capital, as described by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986). The ability to speak English grants access to elite spaces, sets Croft students up for future success, and gives them higher social standing amongst Chileans. Some members of the Croft community use their economic capital to enroll their children in prestigious preschools to prepare them for the academic rigor that exists at Croft. Weis et. al (2014) describe this as an “up front” investment in which families pour money into preparing their child for success within an elite educational sphere (p. 26). At Croft, the attractive nature of the British curriculum is one aspect that makes the admissions process highly competitive. One Croft administrator equated knowing English to “driving a car”—it grants access to new spaces. Those with high levels of cultural capital—speaking English, for example—have an inherent understanding of the “dominant culture” which allows for connections to be formed among very strictly defined socioeconomic lines.

Building A Network: Social Capital

Bourdieu describes “symbolic profits” as something to be gained from an association with or network among elites (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 5). At Croft, social networking within elite spheres begins long before a student enters the admissions office. As addressed by the Head of Admissions at Croft, it is nearly impossible to be

considered for admissions without connections to the school. Allan and Catts (2012) call this “linking social capital,” or establishing connections with those of high social standing. In the case of Croft, families who do not have preexisting familial ties to the school seek out families of high power to write letters of recommendation on their behalf. A letter of recommendation from anyone who is not considered “elite” will not benefit the family in any way. At this point, prospective Croft families begin building a network of “institutionalized relationships” which, according to Bourdieu (1986), provide “symbolic credentials” that allow elites to rise in the social hierarchy. This process, of only allowing those with connections into the school, perpetuates “social class prejudice,” and results in an incredibly homogenous school community (Zimdars et. al, 2009).

This homogeneity is seen inside and outside of the Croft gates—those who exist within them are existing members of elite social spheres, and outside of school, Croft students primarily socialize with members of their own social class. As Golden (2007) notes, elite schools give way to economic and social advantages, and Croft students exemplify this notion through both the lavish vacations they take, and the elite students they spend their time with.

Those who have been members of the Croft community for decades, describe the community as close-knit, family oriented, and traditional. They mask its exclusive nature by sharing stories of class reunions, lifelong friendships, and strong familial bonds. Karabel (2005) very poignantly describes elite admissions processes as excluding families without forms of capital from the process before it even begins (p. 556). This is

obvious in the Croft admissions office; when members of the Croft community, however, see this as a positive thing. Howard & Gaztambide-Fernández (2010) argue that rich parents want their children to be surrounded by other rich students. Parents look at the population of student bodies as indicators of their own child's success (Somers et. al, 2004). In this regard, the closed nature of the Croft community makes it that much more appealing to prospective families. In conversations with administrators, it became clear that success is equated with wealth, and wealth is equated with status. They see a very small population as worthy of gaining the social status associated with attending Croft.

It is within this small, but “worthy” group of Croft families that community members are able to form valuable connections, enhance their own social capital, and gain access to elite universities and jobs. The school holds job fairs, extensively preps its students to take standardized examinations, and begins exposing student to university prospects in Upper Prep (approximately seventh grade). Students apply to university possessing both the cultural capital associated with a Croft diploma and the social capital that is tied to the community, giving them a competitive edge. It is in this process that Croft families begin to see their initial “investment” in elite schooling come to fruition (Weis et. al, 2014).

Buying Status: Economic Capital

Bourdieu (1986) argues that those who possess high levels of economic capital are inherently “endowed” with other associated forms of capital, thereby are more advantaged in accessing elite academic settings. Croft only allows families with high

levels of economic capital through their gates. The high cost of applying, combined with the lack of financial aid, prohibits all but the wealthiest members of Santiago's elite from being considered for admission. Nan Lin (1999) argues that a family's financial decision to "invest" in an elite education comes with the assumption that elite spaces will give way to elite connections. In this sense, economic and social capital are connected, and possession of one grants access to the other. In the case of Croft, students exercise their economic capital by volunteering in "underprivileged" communities. As described by an administrator of the Croft School, the mayor invited Croft students for tea to commend them on their volunteer efforts. This type of community engagement, therefore, benefits those in the elite class by creating opportunities to praise them for their efforts working in an impoverished community. According to Bob Pease (2006), activities such as volunteering allow elite students to develop and identify closely with their elite identity by reinforcing an economic dichotomy between the rich and poor. Students volunteer for small amounts of time, always returning to their elite "bubble."

The criticism by those outside the Croft community that Croftonians exist in a "bubble" comes partly from the notion that Croft families live in very specific sections of the city. Golden (2007) argues that elite schools only recruit in places where elite families exist. In this regard, it makes sense that Croft families all live in wealthy sections of the city. Families come from sections of town where the income taxes are significantly higher and in which a personal vehicle is required to access the city due to limitations of the public transit system (Dockendorff et. al, 2000). The lack of public transportation to Croft assumes that parents have the economic capital needed to create

a flexible work schedule, thereby enabling them to drive their children to school every morning. The cumulative effect of Croft family driving their own vehicle to school gives way to intense traffic jams outside of the school each morning, as residents of La Reina are trying to go about their morning routines. The space that Croft families occupy each morning is a physical manifestation of the economic divides that exist between Croft families and those who live in the surrounding neighborhood.

Abrams and Gibbs (2002) note that economic capital is particularly useful for parent's ability to advocate for their child at school. This is dependent on a flexible work schedule (economic capital), the knowledge of how to communicate in an academic setting (cultural capital), and pre-existing connections with the school community, allowing parents to enter the space and speak with faculty (social capital). It is not surprising that, as Annette Lareau (1987) argues, parents of higher social classes are more involved in their child's academic life. Parents' involvement extends to the admissions process, as evidence by a Croft parent who asked the admissions office for her child to be moved off the waiting list Her ability to personally advocate for her son granted him a Croft education, exemplifying the power of exercising combined forms of capital in admissions.

Perhaps most striking is the lack of discussion among Croft administrators about financial aid. Not only does the school not offer any kind of financial support, but when asked, administrators felt uncomfortable even addressing the topic. Ziegler (2016) argues that many Latin American elite schools structure their processes of admissions to ensure that a very small, elite population are allowed in, while all others must "remain

outside” (p. 13). The school offers very small amounts of financial support in extreme circumstances, but in general, those without economic capital are disregarded.

Furthermore, the lack of engagement with the topic exemplifies an understanding that this practice is unfair, but nevertheless, they show no willingness to reevaluate or change.

Conclusion

Admissions processes in elite schools are strategically structured to find the best, brightest, most talented students. Upon acceptance, these students are molded into becoming leaders among their social groups, prepared to enter top universities, and ultimately, attain high-paying, high-power careers. With their wealth and access to the world of eliteness, graduates of elite institutions are more likely to send their children to a school of similar caliber (Zweigenhaft, 1992). Having accumulated the social capital that comes with attending an elite institution, parents pass down forms of institutionalized capital to their children, better preparing them for success in an elite world (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, the cycle of reproduction continues.

The Croft website boasts about their “very strong sports program” and “high academic standards.” Administrators at Croft used words like “excellent” and “successful” to describe their students. These descriptors are not unique to Croft, but rather are closely aligned with the sentiments reflected in the mission statements of elite schools across the world. Croft faculty help their students to become “all-rounders,” excelling in various subjects, and upholding the guiding pillars of the school—fair play, good manners, joy of learning, spirit of service, and team spirit. As this study has shown, however, a very small part of the Chilean population has access to this type of education.

Institutionalized structures of power exist to allow a small population of people into the elite educational world, while the majority of families are excluded from stepping beyond their gates. By implication, admissions processes in elite institutions uphold inequalities across the society as a whole and actively contribute to the

reproduction of social classes. This creates a very homogenous school community, as described by Mr. Butler, who noted that students interact almost exclusively with members of their own social class. Because of this, students begin to use their privilege as the lens through which they view their own identities and their place in a broader world (Howard et. al, 2014). With this worldview, elite students become accustomed to spending time with other elites, and only interact with people of lower socioeconomic classes within the context of “service.” While participating in service, however, students still receive praise from elite structures—such as government officials—for their selfless work. The question becomes, does the service benefit those in need or those already in power?

Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard (2014) argue that service “is crucial to the public image of economically privileged groups” (p. 2). By participating in service, elites present themselves as giving, selfless, noble citizens, while also “legitimizing their [own] advantages” (p. 2). Giving back to the community is yet another way for elites to present commodified versions of themselves. The self-serving nature of community service at Croft functions as another form of capital, furthering students’ ability to sell themselves as “all-rounded” individuals when applying to college or entering the competitive job market (Deresiewicz, 2015).

One point of improvement in the Croft community, therefore, would be to position service as an opportunity to improve the entire community, as opposed to an obligatory act which Croftonians are ultimately praised for. Croft places deep emphasis on the pillars of the school, one of which is service, but in order to achieve these

expectations, they must re-contextualize community service. It must include a dismantling of power structures such that students are not entering underprivileged communities with a sense of entitlement, but rather, working to foster an ongoing relationship with the communities in need. If Croft opened their gates—both literally and figuratively—to the community, perhaps there would be a better understanding of the harsh inequalities that exist within the Santiago community.

This study has also brought to light the severe inequalities that exist within elite admissions processes. Families often choose private schools with the assumption that their children will be better equipped for success (Somers et. al, 2004). What this study has shown, however, is that students at elite schools are not necessarily better prepared to be successful, but instead, enter these communities with pre-existing forms of capital that already advantage them within society. The school's job, therefore, is to reinforce the elite identities that students already possess. Students, despite what the Admissions Office might say, are not accepted based on merit—they are allowed into the community based on connections, cultural capital, and the ability to pay. In an effort to enrich the Croft community, and better the city of Santiago as a whole, the admissions office must alter their processes and procedures to ensure a more holistic review process.

This begins with a more diverse student body. While many Croft parents assume that a homogenous school population increases academic rigor, Taut and Escobar (2012) argue that a more diverse student body actually contributes to better academic performance. With this in mind, it would be beneficial to the success of all Croft students if the admissions practices were amended to allow for a more diverse applicant

pool. This would include adding a financial aid program, in which families could apply for scholarship money based on demonstrated financial need.

Before this could happen, however, administrators and faculty would need to acknowledge the limitations that exist within their own system. As exemplified by Ms. Aguilar's discomfort in discussing the lack of financial aid, many members of the Croft community perhaps recognize but refuse to acknowledge the exclusive nature of their admissions process. As Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard (2014) state, "[elite] schools...would have to put their very reputations...on the line by becoming not just more diverse...but by shifting the very fabric of privilege that clothes their elite reputations" (p. 4). By accepting a more diverse applicant pool, Croft would challenge its own status of being an "elite" institution, but would ultimately cultivate connections between differing social classes.

Additionally, supporting a more diverse student body would require a complete restructuring of the physical campus, in order to assist anyone with physical disabilities. This would include the construction of more elevators or handicapped accessible bathrooms. As of now, Croft does not accommodate any sort of physical disability, and those with behavioral, emotional, or learning challenges are referred to outside specialists to receive help. Making physical changes to the Croft campus would enable the school to accept more than just able-bodied students.

The aforementioned strategies for implementation would require future research, as there are a number of gaps in this study due to limitations within my own work. While this study has widely analyzed the structures of power that exist within elite

admissions, there is room for improvement. To begin, my inability to speak with Croft students—due to the timing of their summer vacation—provided barriers to understanding the school community. While the opinions of administrators were valuable, speaking with students would have given me better insight into the ways in which Croft students embody, or reject, eliteness. Another limit exists within the scope and diversity of my interviewees. Three of the administrators I spoke with have each spent the majority of their life at Croft. The opinions of the fourth administrator, Mr. Butler, were especially valuable due to his ability to step outside of the Croft community and evaluate the policies and procedures more critically. If future research is conducted on this topic, it will be imperative to speak with a more diverse population of Croft administrators, especially those who have arrived at the school for the first time as a teacher. My study was limited by the number of informants who were so completely inside the Croft community. To understand the ways in which the surrounding community and the school interact, it would have been useful to speak with those who live around the school, or in La Reina. Finally, the breadth of literature available specifically pertaining to elite admissions is limited. While theories of elite American institutions, for example, can be applied to Latin American institutions, my study would have been more comprehensive had there been more access to applicable literature.

Still, this study has brought to light the extensive inequalities that exist within elite school admissions processes. The Croft School is not unique in its actions, but rather, acts as a microcosm of larger trends within the elite educational world. In the United States, for example, over fifty people were charged in the largest college

admissions scandal to date, known as “Operation Varsity Blues.” Parents paid for their children’s grades to be inflated on standardized tests and bribed college coaches and administrators into admitting their child as a “recruited” athlete, among other fraudulent procedures (Medina et. al, 2019). Students were admitted at elite universities such as Yale, University of Southern California, and University of California- Berkeley as a result of the scandal. What this study and the recent scandal have shown, is the lack of critical self-evaluation on the part of admissions offices. In both cases, admissions offices have prioritized those with pre-existing forms of capital—whether they be legacy students, children of celebrities, falsely recruited athletes, or siblings of current students—over those who may be more deserving. This ultimately leads to a social divide in which those without finances, connections, or institutionalized educational knowledge are excluded from elite spaces. Elite American universities still flaunted their decreasing acceptance rates for the Class of 2023, mere weeks after the scandal broke. Despite unfair policies, media attention, and the obviousness of their exclusivity, elite institutions remain focused on how they can market themselves as the “best.”

The Croft School prides itself on its traditional British values, successful alumnae, and excellence amongst its students and faculty. Those within the Croft community view the school as a “home,” a place to form “valuable connections,” a “close” and “inclusive” community. Those outside of the Croft community have less desirable viewpoints, seeing the school as a “different world,” something completely unattainable. In an effort to eradicate the intense divides between the community and the school, Croft administrators, teachers, and students must first recognize their privilege in being part

of such an elite institution. Only if the Croft community understands that it has a responsibility to the community to begin dismantling structures of power will policies and procedures begin to change.

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