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POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**DOES THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY  
ADMISSIONS BOARD EVALUATE AN APPLICANT'S  
MORAL VALUES? IF SO, HOW?**

by

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June 2005

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**DOES THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY ADMISSIONS BOARD  
EVALUATE AN APPLICANT'S MORAL VALUES? IF SO, HOW?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

If moral character is an important trait for an officer, one would assume that the United States Naval Academy would admit only those who possess the highest moral values and the potential for further development. This study explored that assumption. Through the literature review, this study examined the Admission Board's charter, each step of the admissions process and the practice used for evaluating an applicant's moral values. The study considered what impact the espoused values of the Naval Academy had on the Admissions Board members and their determinations with regard to applicants.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. BACKGROUND

Over the last two and a half years, twenty-six Commanding Officers in the United States Navy have been relieved of their commands or fired from their jobs.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority were relieved, not for reasons of competency, but character.

This year over 10,000 young people will apply to the United States Naval Academy (USNA) for induction into the class of 2009. Approximately 1,200 will become midshipmen.<sup>2</sup> At a four year cost of nearly \$278,000 per midshipmen, it is the responsibility of the Admission's Office to identify those applicants who possess the greatest potential for meeting the challenges of naval service in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Admissions Board bases its evaluation of an applicant on four attributes: physical fitness, medical qualification, cognitive aptitude, and moral character. Arguably, the most subjective of these evaluations is for moral character. Never meeting the applicants personally makes the Admission Board's task of discerning the moral character of each applicant more difficult than assessing their other attributes. The twelve members who comprise the Admissions Board bring a variety of backgrounds and perspective to the selection process. This introduces a dynamic that additionally challenges the decisiveness with which the Board is able to render determinations regarding the moral character of an applicant and, therefore, their potential to become a successful Naval Officer.

## B. PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to improve the Admission Board's applicant selection process as the first step in accomplishing the Naval Academy's mission "to develop midshipmen morally...."<sup>3</sup> thus producing leaders of moral character for naval

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<sup>1</sup> Alsina, F. (2005). Character Development Shouldn't Stop After Commissioning. *Proceedings*. Feb 2005, pp. 40.

<sup>2</sup> United States Naval Academy. (2005). Admissions. Retrieved 10 January, 2005 from <https://www.usna.edu/admissions>

<sup>3</sup> United States Naval Academy. (2005). Mission Statement. Retrieved 10 January, 2005 from <https://www.usna.edu/mission>

service. The foundation of the ethics education programming at the Naval Academy and elsewhere in the services is predicated on the notion that we select people who are of sound moral character from the start. This study is a continuation of our ongoing concern to ensure that the ethics program is effective, useful and adds meaning to the lives of the brigade of midshipmen. The desire is to ensure that this starting block is effective and congruent with the entire program. I seek to assess what programs, techniques and theories the Naval Academy's admissions board uses to evaluate the moral values or moral identity of an applicant so as to admit only those candidates with the highest of moral values.

### **C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY**

This study focuses on one primary question: Does the United States Naval Academy Admissions Board evaluate an applicant's moral values? If so, how? Pose this question to anyone associated with the Admissions Office and likely the response will be the obvious textbook answer – yes, of course we evaluate moral character through Blue and Gold Officer interviews, letters of recommendation and background checks.

Probing questions to Admissions Board members will reveal the depth required to fully address the primary question. For example, with respect to moral character, does the Admissions Board eliminate or select from the applicant pool? Are the character attributes most valued in an applicant the same or nearly the same for each of the twelve members of the admissions board? When, for example, it is revealed that an applicant, as a ninth grader was caught stealing a compact disc, what are the variables that affect the admission board's determination of how this incident impacts a person's potential to become a naval officer? What if he's caught experimenting with drugs? How much character is revealed by a young man who has earned an Eagle Scout Badge? It is easier and more efficient for a board member to let the other more quantifiable attributes (physical fitness, medical qualification, and cognitive aptitude) guide his or her evaluation, so how much influence does the moral evaluation have on the final decision to admit or not?

To answer these questions and gain a better understanding of this process, I chose to go to the Admission Board members directly using a proven interview technique that elicits their first-hand experience with the admissions process from which the factors that

drive it can be deduced, instead of asking them directly to analyze themselves. The Critical Incident Interview Technique also minimizes interference from stereotypical reactions or received opinions. I separately interviewed each board member and asked them to focus on an applicant-specific critical incident, a time when they engaged in the selection process while serving on the Admission Board. A critical incident is defined as one which had an important effect on the final outcome and that can only be recognized retrospectively.<sup>4</sup> In this case, the critical incident was a time when the board member evaluated an applicant whom they were confident, possessed sound moral identity.

By following up the initial question with probes, I drew out various themes from the participant. Whereas the Admissions Board members are tasked to assess the moral character of the applicants and are participants in the research, they are referred to as assessors. Insights were gained from the interviews into not only what the assessor was looking at to evaluate the applicant, but also what frame of reference the assessor was using.

I divided the Board into three groups which contain six members each: civilians, senior military officers (O-6 and above) and junior military officers (O-5 and O-3). Interviews were tape-recorded and transcripts then used to capture the process of how the assessor evaluated an applicant's moral identity. From the transcripts I looked for threads or trends from across and within the various categories of the admissions board. The intent was to systematically obtain and analyze data, then create relevant theory for the selection process.

Initially, two interviews from each of the three groups were initially coded (n=6) and from this sample set, twenty-one themes emerged. Using a compare and contrast process<sup>5</sup>, I and another researcher were able to combine some themes, while dropping others. The final analysis resulted in thirteen themes with which to proceed with the interviews. A codebook was created; themes were labeled, defined, given descriptors and exclusions, and examples. Once the codebook was finalized, all the interviews (N=X)

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<sup>4</sup> Flanagan, J. C. (1954) The Critical Incident Technique. *Psychological Bulletin*. Vol. 51, No. 4, pp.327-358.

<sup>5</sup> Glaser, Barney G & Strauss, Anselm L., 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago, Aldine Publishing Company

were coded using the codebook and the results were entered into a spreadsheet for further analysis.

#### **D. SCOPE, LIMITATIONS, DEFINITIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

##### **1. Scope**

The primary research question asks, “Does the United States Naval Academy Admission’s Board evaluate an applicant’s moral values? Is so, how?” This thesis is not intended to critique the Admissions Board or admissions process at the Naval Academy. Instead, it seeks to offer valuable insight into the thoughts and feelings of the members serving on the Admissions Board and Character Review Committee as they relate to making admissions decisions. Although assessors provide their thoughts, stories, and opinions about the process, and I make some inferences and recommendations, they are not presented as one “right” answer or solution to the many challenges that emerge from this process.

##### **2. Limitations**

The study is limited to the board member’s *perceptions* about how best to morally evaluate an applicant. It is acknowledged that board members themselves do not possess some key to moral evaluation not available to others. While moral screening occurs through the political process of gaining a congressional nomination, only the moral screening aspect of the process, the steps that occur in the Naval Academy’s Admissions Office are considered in this study.

The codebook developed and used for the research was not validated. No other researcher applied the codebook to the data to validate the frequency of each code within each interview. The credibility of the results of the research will be significantly increased once the codebook is validated.

As a research who is an active duty military officer, I have biases and perspectives which taint the research in some sense. Every effort was made to abate my perspectives on military culture and values. Despite my best efforts, when working in this subjective arena, my personal values may reflect in the research.

### 3. Definitions

To properly frame the research a number of key definitions must be articulated.

Four key terms exercised in the research are character, values, virtues, and morality.

Each definition is provided:

- Character - The stable and distinctive qualities built into an individual's life which determine his response regardless of circumstances.<sup>6</sup>
- Values – something (as a principle or quality) intrinsically valuable or desirable.<sup>7</sup> Sekerka and Bagozzi<sup>8</sup> describe how standards and values that reside within our moral fiber, our personal values<sup>9</sup>, may prove useful in understanding and explaining sensitivity to the ethical dimensions of organizational life.
- Virtues - attitudes or character traits that enable us to be and to act in ways that develop our highest potential.<sup>10</sup>
- Morality – there are three ways to define this term<sup>11</sup>
  1. A doctrine or system of moral conduct
  2. Particular moral principles or rules of conduct
  3. Conformity to ideals of right human conduct

As Aquino and Reed<sup>12</sup> work to define moral identity, they discuss how it has been previously considered to be a kind of self-regulatory mechanism that motivates moral action. However, they suggest that the term actually refers to a composite of collectively shared moral characteristics. They propose that like other social identities, moral identity is a part of an individual's self-definition. In this study, moral identity (also referred to as moral self-identity herein) is defined as an individual's (in this case applicant's) self

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<sup>6</sup> Editors of the American Heritage Dictionary (Ed.) (2000). American Dictionary of the English Language. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company

<sup>7</sup> Mish, F. C., (Ed.). (1990). *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc.

<sup>8</sup> Sekerka, L. E., & Bagozzi, R. (2004). Moral Courage in the Workplace: Self Regulation as the Cornerstone to Virtuous Action. Paper presented at the Second European Conference on Positive Psychology, Verbania Pallanza, Italy.

<sup>9</sup> Rokeach, M. 1997. *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

<sup>10</sup> Velasquez, M., Andre, C., Shanks, T., S.J., and Meyer, M. J., (1996). Thinking Ethically: A Framework for Moral Decision Making. *Issues in Ethics*, 7(1),6-8.

<sup>11</sup> Mish, F. C., (Ed.). (1990). *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc.

<sup>12</sup> Aquino, K., Reed II, A. (2002). The Self-Importance of Moral Identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(6), 1423-1140.

concept of their moral character. In this work, however, I examine the accessor's perception of an applicant's identity; specifically, they are trying to identify, discern, and determine what this moral identity consists of and, for some accessors, what potential they may sense in that this identity can be further developed.

#### **4. Assumptions**

For the purpose of research there are two key framing boundaries. First, as stated by the primary research question, the study does not assume that the Admissions Board is evaluating moral character. Clearly stated in the Superintendent's Admissions Guidance,<sup>13</sup> Department of the Navy Instructions<sup>14</sup> and Department of Defense Directives<sup>15</sup> the Naval Academy is to admit only those who are of "good" or "high" moral character. The primary question of this study is carefully designed not to jump to any conclusion with regard to the adherence of this directive.

A second key point of this study is that the espoused values (those the Naval Academy is said to subscribe) are indeed being acted upon by the Admissions Board. "Theories of action" postulate regarding what causes one to act on his or her values. With respect to the Admissions Board, it is not assumed that the values of the Admissions Board members or the Naval Academy are being acted upon.

#### **E. ORGANIZATION OF STUDY**

This study is organized into five chapters and three appendices. Chapter II contains historical and background information on the value placed on moral character at the Naval Academy. Particular emphasis is placed on the institution's stated moral purposes, goals and objectives. These goals and objectives are considered in light of the Naval Academy's emphasis on and belief in a moral development theory that people can develop. This is the theory applied by the Character Development Department in various ethics courses and professional training sessions. The Department's aim is to develop midshipmen morally. In addition, espoused values versus theories of action are discussed in light of relevant literature.

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<sup>13</sup> Rempt, R., Admissions Guidance for the Class of 2009. USNA12-35 dtd 27 Sep 04

<sup>14</sup> Dalton, J., U.S. Naval Academy Curriculum and Admissions Policy. SECNAVINST1531.2A dtd 2 Feb 96

<sup>15</sup> Deutch, J. M., Service Academies. DoD Directive Number 1322.22 dtd 24 Aug 94

Chapter III reviews the interview protocols, data collection procedures, and data analysis methodology. Chapter IV presents the data analysis results. Chapter V provides discussion of those results along with the admissions board and CRC's broad definition of moral development. Common themes within and across the various categories of members are discussed based on the data analysis. These themes are supported by specific quotes obtained from the interviews. Chapter VI provides conclusions and recommendations for further research.

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## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. INTRODUCTION

Much research has been conducted regarding the admissions processes of all types of college level institutions. Looking at these works, I could find little with respect to the evaluation of applicant's moral character. For many institutions moral character is not a requisite and even for those which place value on it, it is easiest to default to academic based selection criteria in hopes that cognitive aptitude is an indicator of an individual's ability to morally reason and act.

In this chapter the researcher examines four topics of interest all directly related to the primary research question: *Does the United States Naval Academy Admissions Board evaluate an applicant's moral values? If so, how?*

1. An appraisal of the past and present espoused moral values of the United States Navy and Naval Academy is documented.
2. A synopsis of the Naval Academy's Character Development and Ethics programs is provided.
3. A complete review of the steps in the Admission process is conducted. The inquiry includes requirements of the applicant, responsibilities of the Admissions Office, and the decision-making information and criteria used by the Admissions Board in granting appointments.
4. Lastly, reviews of published articles on espoused values and theories of action are performed.

### B. THE NAVAL ACADEMY'S ESPOUSED MORAL VALUES

To fully appreciate the United States Naval Academy's espoused moral values, it is necessary to understand why the institution was initially founded.

The reasons which were especially assigned, at this time, for establishing the school, were, - first, to give greater concentration to the services of the excellent professors of the navy, and, secondly, to guard the morals of the young midshipmen, who were exposed, while on shore, to numerous temptations.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Marshall, E. C., (1862). *History of the Naval Academy* (p.26). New York: Van Nostrand (p26)

E. C. Marshall's remarks were based on observations he made regarding the Naval Academy's leadership and their priorities, which were tangibly reflected in his remarks. In addressing the professors and students on 10 October 1845, the Naval Academy's first Superintendent and Commandant, Franklin Buchanan stated:

The Regulations of the Navy require you to pass through a severe ordeal, before you can be promoted; you must undergo an examination on all the branches taught at the Naval School before you are eligible to a Lieutenancy; your morals and general character are strictly enquired into, it is therefore expected that you will improve every leisure moment in the requirement of a knowledge of your profession, and you will recollect that a good moral character is essential to your promotion and high standing in the Navy.<sup>17</sup>

The Secretary of the Navy at that time of the Naval Academy's founding, George Bancroft, recognized that moral values are what would set this institution apart and make it unique. This was explicitly stated in the original Plans and Regulations of the Naval School at Annapolis which was addressed to the school's Superintendent.

In collecting them at Annapolis for purposes of instruction, you will begin with the principle that a warrant in the Navy, far from being an excuse for licentious freedom, is to be held a pledge for subordination, industry, and regularity – for sobriety and assiduous attention to duty. Far from consenting that the tone of discipline and morality should be less than at the universities of colleges of our country, the President expects such supervision and management as shall make of them an exemplary body, of which the country may be proud...<sup>18</sup>

With reason, the first four words in the mission of the United States Naval Academy take their place. For generations, every midshipman at the Naval Academy has been required to memorize the Mission Statement.

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<sup>17</sup> "Notice To: Prof and Students Attached to the Naval Academy". (10 Oct 1845). Annapolis: United States Naval Academy, Nimitz Library Special Collections and Archives Division.

<sup>18</sup> "Plans and Regulations of the Naval School at Annapolis". (7 Aug 1845). Annapolis: United States Naval Academy, Nimitz Library Special Collections and Archives Division.

## Mission of the Naval Academy

...to develop midshipmen morally, mentally and physically and to imbue them with the highest ideals of duty, honor and loyalty in order to provide graduates who are dedicated to a career of naval service and have potential for future development in mid and character to assume the highest responsibilities of command, citizenship and government.<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that the naval leadership purposed that the midshipmen would embrace moral values, but what or whose moral values were they to embrace? During the inception of the Naval Academy there was a distinct faith based, religious influence on moral values.

The Commanders of all ships and vessels in the navy, having chaplains on aboard, shall take care that divine service be performed in a solemn, orderly, and reverent manner twice a day, and a sermon preached on Sunday, unless bad weather, or other extraordinary accidents prevent it; and that they cause all, or as many of the ships company as can be spared from duty, to attend at every performance of the worship of Almighty God.<sup>20</sup>

At the dedication of the Naval Academy chapel, the Secretary of the Navy stated:

The primary purpose of this building is to afford a place for Christian worship for upon our adherence to those principles the power of our nation depends.<sup>21</sup>

Considered by Naval Academy officials to be one of the cornerstones of moral development in midshipmen, attendance at church services on Sundays had been mandatory since the founding of the school. The Naval Academy strove to foster spiritual growth and promote the moral development of the midshipmen within the tenants of their particular faith or beliefs. A class action suit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on behalf of a group of midshipmen in 1974 brought this ninety-seven year requirement to an end.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mission of the United States Naval Academy (p.7). *Reefpoints*. Annapolis: Naval Institute.

<sup>20</sup> "An Act for the better government of the Navy of the United States". (28 Aug 1846). Annapolis: United States Naval Academy, Nimitz Library Special Collections and Archives Division.

<sup>21</sup> Moody, D., *Annual Register* of the United States Naval Academy (2 June 1904).

<sup>22</sup> Gelfand, H. M. (2002). "Time, tide, and formation wait for no one": cultural and social change at the United States Naval Academy (p.202), 1949-2000. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2002).

Today, the Naval Academy's mission, "to develop midshipmen morally..." has not changed, but the clarity with which it declares its espoused moral values has. Shifting to more non-offensive, "ACLU acceptable" moral or core values, the Navy has adopted "Honor, Courage and Commitment."<sup>23</sup> These core values are objective, universalizable, and tradition-bound. A discussion of the Character Development and Ethics programs currently in place is provided later in this chapter.

Other espoused moral values embraced at the Naval Academy are encompassed in the Brigade Honor Concept. In 1951, midshipmen William Lawrence and H. Ross Perot were instrumental in conceptualizing and implementing the honor concept of midshipmen. The Honor Concept of the Brigade of Midshipmen was established to urge all hands to carry out their duties with the highest sense of personal integrity and honor. The Honor System is run completely by midshipmen and today still reads very much as the original did over fifty years ago.

#### Honor Concept

Midshipmen are persons of integrity: They stand for that which is right. They tell the truth and ensure that the full truth is known. They do not lie. They embrace fairness in all actions. They ensure that work submitted as their own is their own, and that assistance received from any source is authorized and properly documented. They do not cheat. They respect the property of others and ensure that others are able to benefit from the use of their own property. They do not steal.<sup>24</sup>

The Honor Concept represents the minimum standard that midshipmen are expected to follow. Honor, integrity, and loyalty to the service, its customs, and its traditions, are fundamental characteristics essential to a successful Naval Officer.<sup>25</sup> The offenses of lying, cheating, and stealing are intolerable in the brigade and may be cause for separation from the Naval Academy.

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<sup>23</sup>United States Navy. (2005). Core Values. Retrieved 10 January, 2005, from [www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/traditions/html/corvalu](http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/traditions/html/corvalu)

<sup>24</sup> United States Naval Academy Instruction 1610.3F w/ Ch-2 (2004)

<sup>25</sup> United States Naval Academy. (2005) Honor Concept. Retrieved 10 January, 2005 from [www.usna.edu/Admissions/faq.htm#honorconcept](http://www.usna.edu/Admissions/faq.htm#honorconcept)

With the electrical engineering cheating scandal of 1993, the Naval Academy was faced with a moral crisis. As a result, Midshipmen established the Honor Treatise in 1994. It is premised upon a “thou shalt” rather than a “thou shalt not” principle.

#### The Honor Treatise

As a Brigade we cherish the diverse backgrounds and talents of every midshipman yet recognize the common thread that unites us: the trust and confidence of the American people. They have appointed us to defend our country by developing our minds, our bodies, and most especially, our moral character. It is our responsibility to develop a selfless sense of duty that demands excellence both of ourselves and of those with whom we serve. We must honor our loyalties without compromising our ultimate obligation to the truth. Our leadership must set a standard that reflects loyalty to our goals and the courage to stand accountable for all our actions, both those that lead to success and to those that end in failure. We will never settle for achieving merely what is expected of us but will strive for a standard of excellence that reflects the dedication and courage of those who have gone before us. When we attain our goal, we will raise our expectations; when we fall short, we will rise up and try again. In essence, we espouse leadership by example, a leadership that will inspire others to follow wherever we may lead. Countless challenges and trials lie before us. We believe that those with the strongest moral foundation will be the leaders who best reflect the legacy of the Naval Academy. This is our call as midshipmen: it is a mission we proudly accept.<sup>26</sup>

After an indoctrination summer which includes 15 honor education and character development lessons, the plebes (freshmen midshipmen) reaffirm the Oath of Office after gaining a better understanding of its meaning, and formally declare their intent to abide by the Honor Concept and the Honor Treatise of the Brigade of Midshipmen. The Honor Affirmation ceremony during Parent’s Weekend marks the transition of the new class from a “learning” phase to a “living” phase with regard to honor and integrity.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the Commandant of Midshipmen serves as dean of students and supervisor of all military and professional training. The current Commandant, Captain J. Leidig, has published the “Commandant’s Standard” which is intended for the benefit of every midshipman. In summation, the notice concludes with, “This is the standard. Lead

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<sup>26</sup> United States Naval Academy. (2005) Honor Treatise. Retrieved 10 January, 2005 from [www.usna.edu/CharacterDevelopment/honor/honortreatise](http://www.usna.edu/CharacterDevelopment/honor/honortreatise)

<sup>27</sup> Latta, S. B. (2004) *The Naval Academy Information Program* (p.51). Director of Admissions Instruction 1531.2H (2004).

as men and women of integrity, embrace your heritage, and in all things, be the best.”<sup>28</sup> The Commandant includes in his speeches and concludes each of his e-mails with three qualities: “honor, leadership, effort.”

The United States and its Naval Academy are coming full circle, returning back to its moral roots. In 2001 David McCullough published a best selling book titled “John Adams.”<sup>29</sup> In it, Mr. McCullough addresses a document that very recently, in the busy halls of the Pentagon, has gained renewed interest and emphasis. Signed over two centuries ago by President John Adams the document was written from echoes of moral proclamation made by Bancroft and Buchanan a generation earlier. Title 10 was signed into law near the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Then as now, the requirement for exemplary conduct within the ranks of our Navy and Marine Corps remains in effect and is so great that it can not be addressed with any sort of cavalier approach. The Armed Forces Title 10, Subtitle C (Navy and Marine Corps), Part II (Personnel), CH. 551 (Officers in Command), Sec. 5947 (Requirement of exemplary conduct) states:

All commanding officers and others in authority in the naval service are required to show in themselves a good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination; to be vigilant in inspecting the conduct of all persons who are placed under their command; to guard against and suppress all dissolute and immoral practices, and to correct, according to the laws and regulations of the Navy, all persons who are guilty of them; and to take all necessary and proper measures, under the laws, regulations, and customs of the naval service, to promote and safeguard the morale, the physical well-being, and the general welfare of the officers and enlisted persons under their command or charge.<sup>30</sup>

The latest revision of Title 10 was signed in 2004.

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<sup>28</sup> United States Naval Academy. (2005) Commandant Standard. Retrieved 10 January, 2005 from [www.usna.edu/Commandant/local/CommandantsStandard](http://www.usna.edu/Commandant/local/CommandantsStandard)

<sup>29</sup> McCullough, D. (2001). *John Adams*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

<sup>30</sup> Armed Forces. (2004). Title 10. Retrieved May 3, 2005 from [http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title10/subtitlec\\_partii\\_chapter551.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/uscode/title10/subtitlec_partii_chapter551.html)

### C. A REVIEW OF USNA'S CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT & ETHICS PROGRAMS

In the early 1970s, with church attendance no longer mandatory, the Academy's Board of Visitors, (synonymous with "Board of Trustees") identified a moral void and assembled an ad hoc committee to design a new ethics course as part of the mandatory curriculum. The committee did design the course, but it was not made a mandatory part of the curriculum. Instead it was an academic elective, or more informally taught by officers around the yard.<sup>31</sup>

The electrical engineering cheating scandal of 1993, forced Naval Academy officials to undertake major changes to the existing character development curriculum and programs. A committee was formed in 1994 by then Secretary of the Navy John H. Dalton to review the cheating scandal, and the honor concept in general. The so-called Armitage Committee, named for its chairman, Ambassador Richard Armitage, produced a report detailing nine recommendations for improvement. In an attempt to stem the tide of moral indifference among the midshipmen Admiral Charles Larson, the Superintendent of the Academy initiated a two-pronged response: a character development division and an academic normative applied ethics program.

The Character Development Division advertises an "ethics across the curriculum" approach that drives moral development at the Naval Academy. The character development program utilizes small discussion groups and seminars as a means of bringing into focus the core values (honor, courage and commitment) of the U.S. Navy and by association its' members. The Naval Academy's Character Development webpage states:

The Naval Academy has a deep and abiding commitment to the moral development of its midshipmen and to instilling the Naval service core values of [HONOR, COURAGE, and COMMITMENT](#). The goal of the character development division is to integrate the moral, ethical, and character development of midshipmen across every aspect of the Naval Academy experience. The integrated character development program is

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<sup>31</sup> "U.S.N.A. Board of Visitors Report." (12 April, 1973). Annapolis: United States Naval Academy, Nimitz Library Special Collections and Archives Division.

the single most important feature that distinguishes the Naval Academy from other educational institutions and officer commissioning sources.<sup>32</sup>

The applied ethics program has as its' goals the clarification of moral issues, the development of moral reasoning and, finally, an impetus for moral motivation. The major changes stemming from the Armitage Committee were complete when the Secretary of the Navy authorized the creation of The Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics in 1998 to address issues of ethical importance both within and beyond the confines of the Naval Academy <sup>33</sup> Currently, only one ethics course is mandatory for midshipmen. The “Moral Reasoning for Naval Leaders” (NE203) course is taught to sophomores. The Course Policy cites the five aims for the course:

- To practice the skills of moral reasoning through the study and application of the major traditions of ethical thought.
- To examine a range of classical and cotemporary theories of morality, including Utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, Aristotle’s Character/Virtue ethics, Divine Command and Natural Law.
- To use moral reasoning to apply these philosophical theories to military ethics and personal situations that one may face as a midshipman at the Academy and as a junior officer in the Navy or Marine Corps.
- To study and reflect on the exact nature of the ideal character, virtues, and moral commitments of an officer in the modern U.S. military.
- To improve one’s critical thinking abilities by the practice of written and oral logical argumentation.

Instructors are directed to use the Socratic Method for teaching; leading the midshipmen through a discussion with a series of questions. The intent is to get the students to morally reason for themselves. It is acknowledged that, “In ethics, often, there are no right answers, but there are wrong answers.”<sup>34</sup> There are eight themes throughout the course which reinforce stated aims:

1. What is the right thing to do?
2. Why do we do the right things?

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<sup>32</sup> United States Naval Academy. (2005) Character Development. Retrieved 10 January, 2005 from [www.usna.edu/CharacterDevelopment/homepage](http://www.usna.edu/CharacterDevelopment/homepage).

<sup>33</sup> Clark, T. (2004). *Moral Development at the United States Naval Academy: The Midshipman’s Perspective*. (p.7). Masters Thesis. Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School.

<sup>34</sup> Ruble, R., NE203 Course Coordinator. Interview by author, 15 August 2004. United States Naval Academy, Luce Hall, Annapolis, MD.

3. What are our Rights in the Military?
4. How does loyalty effect your moral decisions?
5. As a person, what is the source of your moral obligation?
6. As a military officer, what is the (distinct) source of your moral obligation?
7. How do you deal with your moral conscience if ordered to do something that may go against your morals?
8. Who do we target? (Who has forfeited their right to life?)

Both the Character Development and Ethics Programs are in keeping with Admirals Larson's Guiding Principles which are still posted in Dahlgren Hall and other places throughout the Naval Academy grounds. They are:

1. Uphold the standards of the Naval Academy.
2. Be a person integrity.
3. Lead by example (meet the standard you hold others to)
4. Strive for excellence without arrogance.
5. Do your best.
6. Treat everyone with dignity and respect.
7. Tolerate honest mistakes from people who are doing their best.
8. Speak well of others (gossip undermines human dignity).
9. Seek the truth (rumors and unverified antidotes undermine morale).
10. Keep a sense of humor and be able to laugh at yourself.

Our goal: Make the chain of command work by enhancing mutual respect and good two-way communication.

#### **D. THE NAVAL ACADEMY'S ADMISSION PROCESS**

Every applicant for admission to the school must be of good moral character, not less than thirteen nor more than seventeen years of age... All Midshipmen on shore, not on leave of absence, will be ordered to the Naval School.<sup>35</sup>

The admissions process has changed with time over the last 160 years. This year the U.S. Naval Academy will receive over 12,000 applicants. Of those, approximately 2,000 candidates are found fully qualified (scholastic, medical, physical aptitude exam

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<sup>35</sup> "Plan of the Naval School at Fort Severn." (28 Aug 1846). Annapolis: United States Naval Academy, Nimitz Library Special Collections and Archives Division.

(PAE), and have obtained a nomination). About 1,500 candidates will receive appointments and approximately 1,200 will accept and become midshipmen.<sup>36</sup>

The applicant, the Admissions Office and the Admissions Board each play a key role in the three-step process of converting an applicant into a candidate and then into a midshipman. First the applicant must complete the preliminary application. Second, the Admissions Office must determine that the applicant's package is competitive enough to categorize him or her as a "candidate." If the applicant is found competitive, a candidate number is assigned and a candidate application package given. Lastly, the Admissions Board examines the completed candidate application package and decides whether or not to recommend the candidate be awarded an appointment. This three-step process, which strives for equity, becomes quite complex as every application is as unique as the individual submitting it. Following is an examination of each of the key role player's responsibilities in this application process.

The Naval Academy's Admission website lists ten steps an applicant must complete for successful application.<sup>37</sup>

Step 1: Social Security Number. Have or obtain a social security number.

Step 2: Eligibility Requirements. Meet the requirements for eligibility:

- United States citizen;
- Good moral character;
- At least 17 and not past their 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday on 1 July of the year they would enter the Academy;
- Unmarried; not pregnant; and no dependants

Step 3: Preliminary Application. Unless a Summer Seminar application has already been submitted, a Preliminary Application needs to be submitted to the Naval Academy. The Office of Admissions will review the information submitted, paying particular attention to scholastic achievement, and will advise whether the applicant's record is strong enough to be competitive for admission. If so, the applicant will be designated as an official candidate and receive an application package.

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<sup>36</sup> United States Naval Academy. (2005) 10 Steps for Admissions. Retrieved 10 January, 2005 from [www.usna.edu/admissions/steps10](http://www.usna.edu/admissions/steps10).

<sup>37</sup> United States Naval Academy. (2005) Admissions. Retrieved 10 January, 2005 from [www.usna.edu/admissions/homepage](http://www.usna.edu/admissions/homepage).

- Step 4: Apply for Nomination. To receive an offer of appointment to the Naval Academy, an applicant must obtain a nomination from an official source. Official sources normally include a U.S. Representative, two U.S. Senators and the Vice President of the United States.
- Step 5: College Admissions Test. The Naval Academy requires candidates to take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT-I) or the American College Test (ACT) prior to admission. Official test results are required for admission.
- Step 6: Official Candidate. If the information provided in your Preliminary Application indicates your record is strong enough, you will become an official candidate for admission and you will receive a complete candidate application packet as early as the July prior to your high school senior year. Upon completion of your candidate file, the Admissions Board will review your record.
- Step 7: Medical Examination. All candidates are required to undergo a thorough medical examination, because graduates will be commissioned in a wide variety of career fields with strict medical standards.
- Step 8: Physical Aptitude Exam. The physical aptitude exam is included in the candidate admission package. The test consists of a 300-yard shuttle run, a kneeling basketball throw, a standing long jump, push-ups and either pull-ups for men or a flexed-arm hang for women.
- Step 9: Interview. In addition to being a source of information and counsel, an official interview with the Blue and Gold Officer is required in order to complete an application.
- Step 10: Deadlines and Selection. The USNA uses a selection process, known as "rolling admissions." As soon as all of your candidate packet forms are received, the Admissions Boards will determine your scholastic "whole person" qualification. If your record of achievement is truly outstanding, you could receive an early offer called a Letter of Assurance. This indicates the Academy's intent to extend an Offer of Appointment, provided all remaining requirements (nomination, PAE, Blue and Gold Officer interview and medical) are successfully completed. A Letter of Assurance could be received as early as September of your senior year. If you are found scholastically qualified but do not receive a Letter of Assurance, you will be competing for an Offer of Appointment from within your nominating sources.

Once completed, the Admissions Office reviews an applicant's Preliminary Application (steps one through five above). There are seven items the Admissions Office examines to determine "scholastic qualification." If the applicant is qualified, the

Admissions Office categorizes the applicant as a “candidate” and permits him to complete the application process (steps six through ten above).<sup>38</sup>

A candidate application package consists of the following:

1. SAT/ACT Test Results. All tests taken after December of the candidate’s junior year in high school will be accepted.
2. High School Transcripts. The Academy requires four years of math through trigonometry, four years of English, one year of chemistry, and suggests two years of modern foreign language, one year of physics, one year of U.S. history and one year of European or world history.
3. High School Teacher’s Recommendations. One each from a math and English teacher.
4. Strong Interest Inventory (SCII). Measures interest in two areas: engineering and science, and career retention.
5. Extracurricular Activities (ECA). Important in evaluating leadership potential. Quality of participation as opposed to quantity should be stressed.
6. Personal Data Record. Requests personal information about the candidate and his or her parents. Two important parts of this form include the Personal Statement, which must accompany the form, and the disclosure of any citations, arrests, convictions, or fines.
7. Physical Aptitude Exam (PAE). A required physical fitness test that the candidate must pass prior to receipt of an appointment.

Once the candidate application package is completed the Admissions Board examines the package and assigns a “Whole Person Multiple” (WPM) value to each candidate. Factors used to calculate the candidate multiple are listed here in order of ability to predict success at the Naval Academy, from greatest to least: high school rank, SAT-M or ACT Math, Secondary School Official Recommendations, SAT-V or ACT English, Extra-Curricular Activities (ECA) (athletic), ECAs (non-athletic), Career Interest Survey, Technical Interest Survey. In those cases where the school does not rank, the GPA is converted to a class rank.

Within the Admissions Office, the staff is broken down into Regional Teams. These Teams may identify candidates who are not competitive and who do not appear likely to compete successfully for an appointment to the Academy or any of the Naval Academy preparatory programs. Notification to uncompetitive applicants is made early in the admission cycle. If a candidate’s WPM is less than 57,000, with few exceptions,

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<sup>38</sup> Latta, S. B. (2004) *The Naval Academy Information Program* (p.29). Director of Admissions Instruction 1531.2H (2004).

he/she is found not qualified; if the WPM is 70,000 or higher, the candidate is considered exceptionally well rounded and may be Qualified Early (QE).

Candidates who are QE, will be considered for Letters of Assurance (LOA) which assures that they will receive an offer of appointment if all of the following requirements are satisfactorily completed by 1 March:

- complete the medical examination
- been granted requisite medical waiver
- have a nomination for an early offer of appointment
- completed a Blue and Gold Officer interview or
- passed their Physical Aptitude Examination

Based largely on the WPM, the Admissions Board determines which candidates to recommend for appointments.

One of the key pieces of information that Admissions Board examines is the candidate interview. Step nine in the application process requires an interview of the candidate by a Blue and Gold Officer. The Candidate Interview Guide details key concepts and points that the Blue and Gold Officer is instructed to look for. The Guide states that, "Six major categories of behavior have shown potential for predicting success: interest and motivation to attend, leadership potential, responsibilities undertaken, organization of tasks and activities, physical fitness, and oral communications skills." The Blue and Gold Officer is to rank these six categories with respect to each candidate. The Candidate Interview Guide offers many typical questions to assist the Blue and Gold Officer in probing a candidate's strengths and weaknesses. A few examples include:

- What is the mission of the Naval Academy and what does that mean to you?
- Tell me about the Naval Academy's Honor Concept? [Mandatory Question]
- Will you be able to report a roommate for an honor violation? [the principle of "choosing the greater good"]
- What do you perceive to be the purpose of Plebe summer?
- Why do you think you have the stamina, fortitude, and dedication it will take to survive at USNA?
- Tell me about a failure you have experienced and what you learned from it?
- Have you set any personal goals? What are they?
- Define concepts of responsibility and accountability and the difference between the two?
- Do you have a police record of any kind? Belong to a gang? School misconduct record? Have you tried drugs?
- Tell me what you consider to be the attributes of a good leader?

- How do you prioritize activities?

In the written summary of the interview, the Blue and Gold Officer is instructed to provide the following three items to the Admissions Board:

1. A word picture of the candidate.
2. Supporting information on the ranking they have given for each of the six behavior areas.
3. A sentence or two bolstering your recommendation to select or not select a candidate for appointment.

The Admissions Board is composed of 12 members and meets weekly to consider the candidate packages.<sup>39</sup>

A Character Review Committee (CRC) meets every Wednesday from August to April for applicants whose application package reflects any history of poor judgment, dishonorable behavior or a trend of misconduct. There are three ways a package can draw the attention of the CRC.<sup>40</sup>

1. A positive response to question #6 on the Candidate Personal Data Record. It asks, “Have you been cited, arrested, convicted or fined for any violation of any law or ordinance?”
2. A positive response to questions #15 on the Candidate Personal Data Record. It asks, “Have you ever been placed on probation, suspended, or expelled from high school, prep school, or college?”
3. A cited honor offense or trend of misconduct in any reference letter for the applicant.

The intent of the CRC is to determine how or if the adverse incident or trend should affect the applicant’s package as it competes before the Admissions Board. The CRC has the authority to administer any of the following recommendations to the Admissions Board:

- Disqualify the package
- Only allow the candidate indirect admission (i.e. he must first go to a prep school or other college for a time to further demonstrate positive character)
- Down RAB (Recommendations of Admissions Board) and let compete

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<sup>39</sup> Rempt, R. P., (2004) Admissions Guidance for the Class of 2009 (27 September, 2004). United States Naval Academy. Annapolis, MD.

<sup>40</sup> Disher, T. A., Head of Candidate Guidance, Interview by author, 15 November 2004. United States Naval Academy, Leahy Hall, Annapolis, MD.

- Let the package compete as is; find the incident or trend too insignificant to have counted against the applicant's character

The CRC was formed based on the Superintendent and Dean of Admission's Guidance. No other directives instruct or mandate the committee's existence or mission. The Committee is composed of six members: a clinical psychologist (PhD), the Director of Admissions or the Dean of Admissions, the Director of Candidate Guidance, the Associate Director of Athletics, a Character Development Division Representative, and the Head of Nominations and Appointments.

A case is briefed to the CRC by stating the applicant's name, hometown, and basic statistics (Whole Person Multiple score, class standing, SAT scores etc). A complete appraisal of the honor incident or misconduct trend is then recited. Members of the CRC may ask further questions regarding the package and discuss the matter in light of all the known facts. The CRC must unanimously conclude one of the four determinations for the package. In order to be as consistent as possible, the CRC often asks, "What have we done with this type of case in the past?" Over the past two years of the CRC's existence, precedences have been set, but there are no "hard and fast" guidelines dictating any of its recommendations.

## **E. RELEVANT THEORY**

### **1. Kohlberg – Moral Development**

An emphasis on accepting only the most morally sound applicants is not to discount the notion that midshipmen can and will experience further moral development during their time at the Naval Academy. The potential moral development of a young person from the time he is age sixteen (beginning the application process) to eighteen (typical entry age for midshipmen) should be considered. To grasp this potential, a review of the one of the predominant moral theorists, Lawrence Kohlberg, is provided.

In an attempt to prove his theories on how we develop morally, Kohlberg relied on clinical interviews which he conducted at three year intervals over the lives of his subjects. Kohlberg proposed six moral stages which were categorized into three levels: the preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. The levels were differentiated by their emphasis on rules, society, and internal feelings but it was a person's concept of justice that drove Kohlberg's theories. The concept of justice for a newborn to age nine

(preconventional level) was characterized by an effort to avoid punishment or to serve the child's own interests. The next level (conventional) into young adulthood and was characterized by conscience, and social harmony. The last level (postconventional) was identified by a perceived obligation to uphold universal principles and commitments.<sup>41</sup> James Rest describes Kohlberg's three levels in terms of, "(1) what is right, (2) the reason for upholding the right, and (3) the social perspective behind each stage."<sup>42</sup> Before Kohlberg's work, it was generally accepted that it was not the individual, but society that dictated the standards of morality.

A closer look at each of Kohlberg's six stages is provided by Thomas Lickona. Stage 1 and 2 are considered the Preconventional Level. He describes stage 1 as "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" approach towards justice. Stage 2 progresses into "let's make a deal."<sup>43</sup>

The Conventional Level contains stage 3 and 4. Stage 3 is characterized by justice and is generally viewed in light of the Golden Rule. Stage 4 reflects an individual who possesses an understanding of social responsibilities to include a just distribution of rights, duties, responsibility and law. One of the conclusions of Kohlberg's research was that 80% of the general public never develops beyond stage 4.

Kohlberg's Postconventional Level encompasses stage 5 and 6 and is generally not observed in individuals until after their mid twenties. Stage 5 is the recognition or realization that morality supercedes man-made law. It acknowledges the law's responsibility to protect the rights of individuals but understands that the laws themselves are based on moral principles. The final stage, Stage 6 is characterized by the ability to understand and explain the universal ethical principles which serve as the foundation for human rights. Through his longitudinal research, Kohlberg believed that only a minority

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<sup>41</sup> Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: the nature and validity of moral stages* (p.xxvii). San Francisco: Harper & Row

<sup>42</sup> Rest, J. (1994). Background: Theory and research. In J. Rest & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Moral Development in the Professions: Psychology and Applied Ethics* (p.2). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>43</sup> Lickona, T. (1980). What does moral psychology have to say to the teacher of ethics? In D. Callahan & S. Bok (Eds.), *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education* (pp. 103-132). New York: Plenum Press

of adults will ever reach the postconventional level of understanding<sup>44</sup> and in fact he never observed an individual who had progressed to stage 6.<sup>45</sup>

One significant criticism leveled against Kohlberg's work in his lack of consideration for gender biases. Carol Gilligan in her book last revised in 1993 states that the male approach to morality is that individuals have certain basic rights, and that you have to respect the rights of others. So morality imposes restrictions on what you can do. The female approach to morality is that people have responsibilities towards others. So morality is an imperative to care for others. Gilligan summarizes this by saying that male morality has a "justice orientation", and that female morality has a "responsibility orientation."<sup>46</sup>

## **2. Argyris - Espoused Values vs. Theories of Action**

One variable within the admissions board which should be considered is the application of the assessor's espoused values with respect to their theories of action. Dr. Chris Argyris, a retired professor from Harvard University's Graduate Program, postulated that few people are aware that the theories they espouse are not the theories they use.

Dr. Argyris states many people are blind to the fact that they do not behave according to their espoused theories and gives two possible explanations of why.<sup>47</sup> First, most are programmed with theories in use that tutor us not to reflect accurately on our behavior and its impact, especially while interacting with others. Secondly, most are not programmed to alert others when we observe them behaving incongruently with what they espouse. The net result is that an individual says they believe in something, and actually thinks they are acting on that belief, but it's all a story, not actual behavior "in action."

Theories of action have two basic components. First there are the values that holders attempt to satisfy also called governing variables. They are "(a) to unilaterally

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<sup>44</sup> Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: the nature and validity of moral stages* (p.xxvii). San Francisco: Harper & Row

<sup>45</sup> Lickona, T. (1980). What does moral psychology have to say to the teacher of ethics? In D. Callahan & S. Bok (Eds.), *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education* (pp. 105-106). New York: Plenum Press

<sup>46</sup> Gilligan, C. (1993). In *A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Boston: Harvard University Press

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

define the purpose of a situation (b) to win and not to loss, (c) to suppress feelings, and (d) to emphasize intellectual aspects of everyday life.”<sup>48</sup> The second component addresses behavioral strategies that people use to satisfy these governing variables; behavioral strategies such as “(a) advocating a position and unilaterally controlling others in order to win that position; (b) unilaterally controlling the tasks to be done; and (c) unilaterally deciding how much people are to be told, how much is to be withheld, and how much they are to be deceived about what is being distorted and withheld.”<sup>49</sup>

As Admission Board members assess an applicant’s package through the lens of their espoused values and the espoused values of the Naval Academy, for the reasons Dr. Argyris notes, it may not be assumed that resulting actions or determinations are congruent with those espoused values. The dynamics of the process and personalities involved may cause behavior that is not in line with one’s espoused values.

#### **F. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has reviewed the literature on the admissions process and provided a historical perspective on the values of the Naval Academy. Clearly Naval Academy midshipmen stand on the broad shoulders of those who have gone before. Literature of the Academy’s founding founders undeniably expresses their determination to produce officers of the highest moral character.

Based on this understanding, the researcher will attempt to understand how or if the espoused values of the Naval Academy are being represented in the admissions process. This study will now shift its focus to the admissions board and character review committee. The next chapter outlines the researcher’s methodology and other particulars of the research. I was unable to find any prior literature that specifically studied moral values with regard to the Naval Academy’s admission process.

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<sup>48</sup> Argyris, C. (1976) *Six presidents: Increasing leadership effectiveness*. New York: Wiley.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. TARGET RESEARCH GROUPS AND AREAS

The researcher limited his examination of the Naval Academy’s admission process to the evaluation of moral identity. In order to identify the stakeholders in this decision making process, the researcher attended an afternoon session of both the Admissions Board and the CRC. Based on those experiences and answers to some qualifying questions posed to board members, it became apparent that the list of stakeholders was inclusive to the Admissions Board, the CRC, and the Superintendent of the Naval Academy who annually provides written guidance to these bodies.

Members and alternates to the Admissions Board and the CRC are appointed by the Superintendent. Tables 1 and 2 list the members appointed to each during the time of the research.<sup>50</sup>

TABLE 1. ADMISSIONS BOARD MEMBERS

<b>Admissions Board</b>	
COL K. A. Inman, USMC	Chairman of the Admissions Board Director, Division of Humanities and Social Science
CAPT K. S. Pugh, USN (1)	Director, Division of Mathematics and Science
CAPT R. Thayer, USN (1)	Director, Division of Professional Development
CAPT R. W. White, USN (1)	Director, Division of Engineering and Weapons
Capt M. B. Bruggeman, USMC	12th Company Officer
Prof J. E. Fredland	Economics
LT J. M. Gonzalez, USN	30th Company Officer
CAPT S.B. Latta, USN	Director of Admissions
Prof. R. F. Maruszewski, Jr.	Mathematics
Prof C. P. Ratcliffe	Mechanical Engineering
CDR Y. Reagans, USN (2)	2nd Battalion Officer
Coach D. P. Smalley	Associate Director of Athletics
CDR D. Smith, USN (2)	4th Battalion Officer
Dean D. A. Vetter	Dean of Admissions
<b>NOTES:</b> (1) Only 2 of 3 Division Directors will attend the Admissions Board each week.	
(2) Only 1 Battalion Officer will attend the Admission Board each week.	

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<sup>50</sup> USNA NOTICE 5420 w/ errata dtd 30 Sept 04

TABLE 2. CHARACTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

<b>Character Review Committee</b>	
CDR T. A. Disher, USN	Head, Candidate Guidance
CDR S. Cuthbert, USN	Head, Nominations and Appointments
CAPT S.B. Latta, USN (3)	Director of Admissions
Dean D. A. Vetter (3)	Dean of Admissions
Coach D. P. Smalley	Associate Director of Athletics
Dr. P. Held	Staff Clinic Psychologist
CAPT R. P. Schoultz, USN	Director, Professional Development
<b>NOTE:</b> (3) Dean and Director of Admissions will alternate on the CRC	

Each member of the Admissions Board, CRC and the Superintendent was asked for an interview.

**B. DATA GATHERING**

**1. Critical Incident Technique**

The researcher employed the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to gather data via interview from each of the stakeholders. As described in a published article by John C. Flanagan,

The critical incident technique consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles.<sup>51</sup>

The CIT is a method for getting a subjective report while minimizing interference from stereotypical reactions or received opinions. The user is asked to focus on one or more critical incidents which they experienced personally in the field of activity being analyzed. A critical incident is defined as one which had an important effect on the final outcome. Critical incidents can only be recognized retrospectively.

**2. Developing Protocols**

Appendixes A, B, and C provide the protocol for the Admissions Board, CRC and Superintendent respectively. The Admissions Board and CRC protocol were generated

<sup>51</sup> Flanagan, J. C. (1954) The Critical Incident Technique. *Psychological Bulletin*. Vol. 51, No. 4, pp.327-358.

using the CIT. The interviewees of the Admissions Board were asked to reflect on a time when they were certain that a particular applicant had strong moral identity. The CRC members were each asked to recall a time when their initial perception of an applicant was positively influenced during committee discussion time. Each interview commenced with the researcher reading the protocol verbatim.

During the course of the interviews, the researcher attempted to restrict himself to probing questions only. Questions such as, “Can you please say more?”, “I’m sorry, I really don’t understand, can you add more descriptive details?”, “What is it about this situation exactly that led you to believe this?”, “How did you come to that conclusion?”, “I’m sorry, I know it sounds like I’m repeating myself, but I need to know how you knew that.” were used.

### **3. Superintendent’s and Dean of Admission’s Guidance**

For the Superintendent’s protocol, the researcher designed a series of five questions. Three considerations were taken into account when formulating the protocol:

1. What Key Assumptions Am I Making About the Superintendent?
  - The Admissions Process is a priority.
  - Character is important relative to mental and physical aspects of an applicant.
  - The Supt possess a working knowledge of the process.
  - The Supt believes we are bringing in the best candidates.
  - Adherence to the CNO’s human capital strategy is an aim.
  
2. What I Know I Don’t Know – Questions that I’d ask.
  - What causes him to shape/change his guidance to the admissions board annually?
  - How much does he believe a midshipman’s character or morals can be developed while at USNA?
  - Are there thresholds of moral character below which even the Academy moral development programs and experience can’t build upon and rise to the desired standard?
  - What are the most important character qualities he wants to see in a candidate?
  - How does the Supt weigh physical, mental, and moral aspects?
  
3. What Are Some Underlying Questions Whose Answers I Would Derive from His Responses?
  - Man vs. Role → from which is he acting? Motive?

- To what extent is he engaged in the Admissions Board's work?
- Are determinations of the Admissions Board the same as would be his own?
- If he knew how the Admissions Board was making moral determinations, would he agree with them?

The Superintendent's Protocol is provided in Appendix C.

The final source of data for the research was the Superintendent's and Dean of Admission's guidance to the Admissions Board. Annually the Superintendent and Dean of Admissions tailor their guidance to address the needs of the naval service from their perspective. Portions of this guidance address issues of moral relevance.

### **C. CODE DEVELOPMENT**

Having transcribed the interviews verbatim, an inductive method using thematic analysis was employed to better understand the process and to develop theory from the data. Using thematic analysis, a data driven approach, allowed the coder to develop themes directly from the data in three stages. First the coder gained a perception of a pattern (or theme); second the pattern was classified or encoded and finally the pattern was interpreted.<sup>52</sup> A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was utilized to assist the data management in tracking the frequency of each code. This enabled the researcher to group data that were assigned various themes or labels.

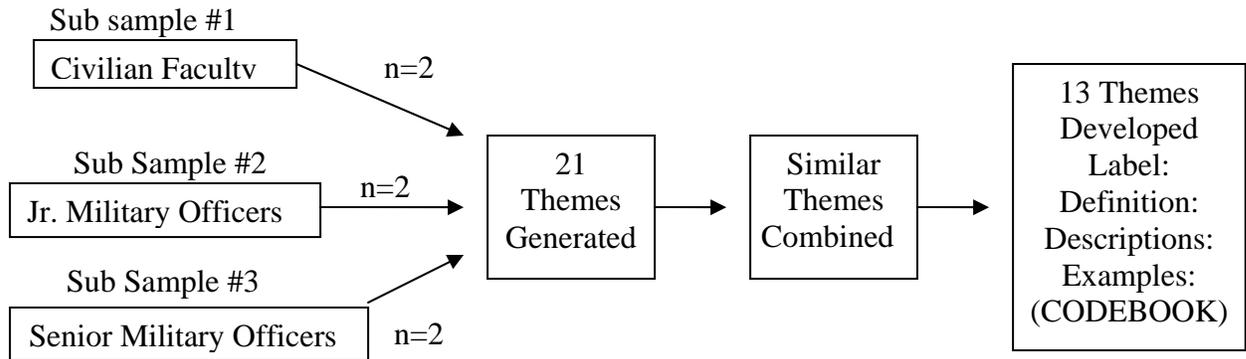
This process of systematically obtaining and analyzing data from social research and then creating theory is called *grounded theory*.<sup>53</sup> The study attempted to identify if the admissions board was evaluating an applicant's moral identity. As such, the development of data driven themes provided the greatest benefit in the development of theory. The process of developing the code book is shown in Figure 1.

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<sup>52</sup> Richard E. Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Barney G. Glaser and Asnelm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, (New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1967)

FIGURE 1. DEVELOPING THE CODEBOOK



To begin, the entire sample of interviews (N=18) was divided into the three targeted groups. Each group had six evaluators. From each group, subsamples of two transcriptions were selected. The subsamples were comprised as follows:

- Subsample 1: Civilian Evaluators - (2 transcripts)
- Subsample 2: Junior Officer (O-5 and below) Evaluators – (2 transcripts)
- Subsample 3: Senior Officer (O-6 and Supt) Evaluators – (2 transcripts)

The first subsample was examined numerous times and evaluated for common areas discussed by the interviewees. The research focused on two areas which were voiced. First, what moral characteristics or qualities were the evaluators looking for the applicant to possess? Second, what standards, experiences or frame of reference were the evaluators applying in their assessment of an applicant?

All the subsamples' codable moments were initially identified and labeled or categorized into themes. After this categorization analysis, the themes were reviewed again and similar themes were combined to form descriptive themes. Each theme was redefined and analyzed. The researcher chose intuitively and using common sense what could be combined. Some themes were similar enough to pour into one code. The result of this process yielded a total of thirteen themes that surfaced from the first subsample.

An identical approach was taken with the second and third subsamples. The consolidation process was also repeated on the second and third subsamples. Ultimately, a total of twenty-one themes were refined down to thirteen. Further developing and

defining these themes, a simplified format for the codebook was applied which included identification of labels, definitions, qualifications and exclusions, and examples.

Once the codebook was finalized, the entire codebook was used to code the rest of the data. Normally, that resulting data would be used inclusively for the analysis. Given the limited population (N=18), I used the final codebook to recode the six interviews used as subsamples in the development of the codebook so they may be used in the analysis.

## IV. DATA ANALYSIS

### A. MORAL EVALUATION KEY POINTS

The first underlying, most basic question with regard to data analysis was: What pieces or key points of the application package do evaluators examine to determine an applicant's moral identity? Based on the key points cited in the interviews, it was found that the answer actually varied from one evaluator to another. Provided in no particular order, is a compilation of all the key points evaluators referenced to cue themselves in on what they consider to be indicators of an applicant's moral identity. These indicators filter out all information dealing with an applicant's academics, physical fitness or medical exam results.

- Question #3 on the "School Official's Evaluation of Candidate" form asks the math or English teacher to evaluate how well the applicant demonstrates personal integrity." The teacher must categorize the applicant as either top 1%, top 10%, above average, average, below average, or not observed. The School Official is allotted the space of about five sentences to comment on the applicant's overall character and academic abilities.
- Question #6 on the "Candidate Personal Data Record" form asks, "Have you ever been cited, arrested, convicted or fined for any violation of any law or ordinance?"
- Question #15 on the "Candidate Personal Data Record" form asks, "Have you ever been placed on probation, suspended, or expelled from high school, prep school, or college?" If yes, the police report is examined when provided.
- Letters of Recommendation. The student's guidance counselor is asked to write a letter of recommendation. Other letters of recommendation may also be submitted.
- Personal Statement. The applicant is asked to write a personal statement describing (1) "what lead to your initial interest in the naval service and how the Naval Academy will help you achieve your long range goals" and (2) "a personal experience you have had which you feel has contributed to your own character development and integrity."
- NASS Evaluations. If attended, evaluations from the Naval Academy Summer Seminar Program are considered.

- Prior Enlisted Evaluations. Evaluations from Commanding Officers at whatever command they are applying from if currently enlisted.
- The “Candidate Activities Record.” This portion of the application package requires the applicant to bubble in participation in such things as athletics, school ECAs, Boy Scouts, church groups, etc.
- Blue and Gold Officer Interview. The Blue and Gold Officer’s (BGOs) interview many times addresses the applicant’s interpersonal skills and clarifies other character elements or situational considerations which should be included in the package.

## **B. CATEGORIZATION OF INTERVIEWS**

Fourteen individuals are assigned to the Admissions Board and seven to the CRC. The Director of Admissions, Dean of Admissions, and Associate Director of Athletics serve on both bodies. For the stated reason of privacy, one civilian member of the Admission Board declined an interview; all other members provided a 45-60 minute interview. The Superintendent provided a 25 minute interview.

The transcripts were divided into three target groups. There are five members of the Civilian group, six in the senior military (O-6 & above) group, and six in the junior military (O-5 & below) group. The groups were then compared to one another to determine whether certain themes were more likely to be prevalent within or across one group or another. Using Microsoft Excel, spreadsheets were generated to report various aspects of each theme. From the spreadsheets, Tables 3 - 7 were created to highlight the differences among the target groups. These Tables will be discussed later in the chapter.

## **C. CODEBOOK**

The thirteen themes that emerged from the data depict the assessor’s various perceptions of the admissions process and its effect on determinations of moral identity. A description of each is provided.

### **THEME 1: Applies ideal – person fits current mold**

Assessor has preconceived notions of what an ideal midshipman should “look” like and attempts to determine if the applicant fits that mold.

### **THEME 2: Interpretation of subjective data / evidence.**

The message of recommendation letters is perceived to be conveyed in an implicit manner. The assessor “reads between the lines” using his/her own framework to interpret the data.

**THEME 3: Imaginary line for selection standard**

Draws upon a personal principle distinction or “line” to make determinations on moral character.

**THEME 4a: Focus: Selection**

Focus on finding reasons to qualify/select an applicant (i.e., glass half full approach).

**THEME 4b: Focus: Elimination**

Focus on reasons to eliminate an applicant (i.e., glass half empty approach).

**THEME 5: Response / reaction / learning from moral failure**

Considers ensuing actions and attitudes with regard to a moral failure as cause to screen in or out.

**THEME 6: Knowledge of commitment / responsibility, understands what is involved**

Seeks to weed out applicants who are uncertain of the commitment, the desired direction for their lives, or what values they ascribe to.

**THEME 7a: Timeframe for success: Graduation**

Bases qualification for admission on the applicant’s propensity and likelihood of graduating from the Naval Academy.

**THEME 7b: Timeframe for success: Officer**

Bases qualification for admission on the applicant’s propensity and likelihood of being a capable naval officer.

**THEME 8: Unique Experience**

Considers unique experiences as uniquely qualifying. Usually the experience is societal or family related (ex. being raised without a father figure or raised traveling abroad).

**THEME 9: Focus on others**

Possesses a healthy outward focus and displays genuine, active concern for others and meeting their needs.

**THEME 10a: Personal Characteristic: sincerity**

Displays the character trait of sincerity.

**THEME 10b: Personal Characteristic: truthfulness**

Displays the character trait of truthfulness.

**THEME 10c: Personal Characteristic: respect (for authority)**

Displays the character trait of respect (for authority).

**THEME 10d: Personal Characteristic: motivation**

Displays the character trait of motivation or perseverance.

**THEME 11: Athletics as an indicator of leadership and character**

Participation in athletics at the varsity level is a strong indicator of leadership abilities and character development.

**THEME 12: Consideration for cultural norms / societal influence or trends acting on the board**

Consideration is given to the cultural norms or societal influences acting on an applicant. The parameters for acceptable behavior vary based on background. Also includes, current events which shape the perspective of the assessor.

**THEME 13: Self Minimalizing**

Assessor discounts his or her qualifications or ability to make determinations with regard to an applicant's moral identity.

**D. FREQUENCY ANALYSIS**

Given the different sizes of groups, certain calculations had to be completed in order to provide a clear picture of the data. The first calculation involved taking the frequency average among the three target groups, of each of the thirteen themes as shown in Table 1 below. These averaged frequencies resulted from the analysis of the data and enable comparisons to be made between the three groups. Outcomes revealed by the data help highlight similarities and differences. Discussion of the results is provided in chapter five.

TABLE 3. AVERAGE FREQUENCY BY TARGET GROUP

Themes		Average Frequency Per Target Group			
		Senior Military (n=6)	Junior Military (n=6)	Civilians (n=5)	Supt.
1	Applies ideal - person fits current mold	5.7	5.0	3.6	3.0
2	Interpretation of subjective data/evidence	4.8	6.5	7.6	0.0
3	Imaginary line for selection standard	2.8	5.0	3.6	4.0
4a	Focus: Selection	1.8	1.7	1.6	2.0
4b	Focus: Elimination	4.2	2.7	2.2	1.0
5	Response / reaction / learning from moral failure	2.7	3.7	2.0	2.0
6	Knowledge of commitment / responsibility, understands what is involved	2.5	2.3	1.8	2.0
7a	Timeframe for success: Graduation	2.2	1.8	2.0	0.0
7b	Timeframe for success: Officer	1.3	1.3	1.2	4.0
8	Unique Experience	2.3	1.0	1.8	2.0
9	Focus on others	3.2	3.7	3.8	2.0
10a	Personal Characteristics: Sincerity	1.3	1.7	1.2	0.0
10b	Personal Characteristics: Truthfulness	4.8	3.8	2.2	3.0
10c	Personal Characteristics: Respect (for authority)	0.7	1.0	0.2	0.0
10d	Personal Characteristics: Motivation	1.3	2.5	1.8	2.0
11	Athletics as an indicator of leadership and character	1.5	2.2	1.2	2.0
12	Consideration for cultural norms / social influence or trends acting on the board	3.7	3.7	6.8	2.0
13	Self minimizing	0.3	1.5	1.0	0.0
	TOTAL	47.2	51.0	45.6	31.0

The next calculation tested the standard deviation within each group. This calculation was purposed to skyline any wild variations which may have skewed the results within a group. For example, if a theme appears in a group (six interviews) with frequencies of 4, 5, 7,6,5,3 the average frequency would be five with a standard deviation of 1.41. If however the frequencies in the group were 14, 4, 3,3,2,4, the average would still be five, but the standard deviation would be 4.47. The higher standard deviation alerts the researcher that the average of five is not a true representation of the group's emphasis on that theme. Table 2 provides a review of the standard deviations. Chapter 5 will provide discussion on the results.

TABLE 4. STANDARD DEVIATION BY TARGET GROUP

Themes		Standard Deviation Per Target Group		
		Senior Military (n=6)	Junior Military (n=6)	Civilians (n=5)
1	Applies ideal - person fits current mold	3.6	2.8	2.7
2	Interpretation of subjective data/evidence	2.7	5.9	5.4
3	Imaginary line for selection standard	1.6	3.0	3.8
4a	Focus: Selection	2.3	0.8	1.1
4b	Focus: Elimination	1.6	1.2	1.9
5	Response / reaction / learning from moral failure	1.5	3.4	2.5
6	Knowledge of commitment / responsibility, understands what is involved	2.2	1.2	1.9
7a	Timeframe for success: Graduation	1.5	1.6	2.1
7b	Timeframe for success: Officer	1.2	1.8	1.3
8	Unique Experience	2.1	1.3	2.5
9	Focus on others	3.1	1.2	3.0
10a	Personal Characteristics: Sincerity	2.4	0.8	1.8
10b	Personal Characteristics: Truthfulness	2.8	2.0	1.6
10c	Personal Characteristics: Respect (for authority)	1.0	1.3	0.4
10d	Personal Characteristics: Motivation	1.6	3.8	1.6
11	Athletics as an indicator of leadership and character	2.4	1.7	1.8
12	Consideration for cultural norms / social influence or trends acting on the board	0.5	3.2	5.5
13	Self minimizing	0.0	1.2	1.7

Next, the researcher sought to accurately identify patterns occurring within and across the target groups. To account for the various lengths of interviews, percentages were used with respect to frequency in order to appreciate the actual emphasis that was placed on each theme by each individual and each group. For example, an interview that lasted 45 minutes, compared to another which lasted 66% longer (1 hr, 15 min) will naturally have fewer “codable moments” and yield a comparatively lower total frequency for each theme. For example, let’s say two assessors were being coded for “Focus on Others” and the first assessor’s interview was 45 minutes long, he addressed the theme four times, and the sum of all his codable moments was 50. The second assessor addressed the theme six times, but her interview lasted 1 hr., 15 min. and the sum of her codable moments was 75. If the researcher limited his analysis to knowing that the theme was addressed by the first assessor four times and second assessor six themes, the logical conclusion would be that the second assessor placed more emphasizes on the theme. To adjust for this incongruence, the researcher analyzed what percentage of times each theme came up in each interview and then compared percentages within and across groups. In the example, the first assessor referenced the theme four times out of a total of 50 or 8%; the second assessor referenced the theme six times out of a total of 75 or 8%. In fact the same emphasis was placed on the theme. Table 3 illustrates the differences in percentages of for each theme across the groups. Discussion of these similarities and differences is provided in Chapter V.

TABLE 5. PERCENTAGE OF FREQUENCY BY TARGET GROUP

Themes		Percentage of Frequency Per Target Group			
		Senior Military (n=6)	Junior Military (n=6)	Civilians (n=5)	Supt.
1	Applies ideal - person fits current mold	12.0%	9.8%	7.9%	9.7%
2	Interpretation of subjective data/evidence	10.2%	12.7%	16.7%	0.0%
3	Imaginary line for selection standard	6.0%	9.8%	7.9%	12.9%
4a	Focus: Selection	3.9%	3.3%	3.5%	6.5%
4b	Focus: Elimination	8.8%	5.2%	4.8%	3.2%
5	Response / reaction / learning from moral failure	5.7%	7.2%	4.4%	6.5%
6	Knowledge of commitment / responsibility, understands what is involved	5.3%	4.6%	3.9%	6.5%
7a	Timeframe for success: Graduation	4.6%	3.6%	4.4%	0.0%
7b	Timeframe for success: Officer	2.8%	2.6%	2.6%	12.9%
8	Unique Experience	4.9%	2.0%	3.9%	6.5%
9	Focus on others	6.7%	7.2%	8.3%	6.5%
10a	Personal Characteristics: Sincerity	2.8%	3.3%	2.6%	0.0%
10b	Personal Characteristics: Truthfulness	10.2%	7.5%	4.8%	9.7%
10c	Personal Characteristics: Respect (for authority)	1.4%	2.0%	0.4%	0.0%
10d	Personal Characteristics: Motivation	2.8%	4.9%	3.9%	6.5%
11	Athletics as an indicator of leadership and character	3.2%	4.2%	2.6%	6.5%
12	Consideration for cultural norms / social influence or trends acting on the board	7.8%	7.2%	14.9%	6.5%
13	Self minimizing	0.7%	2.9%	2.2%	0.0%

#### **E. “ASSESSOR APPLIES” THEMES**

Having identified thirteen major themes and three target groups, the researcher made one more delineation within the data. Responses revealed emergent themes which may be categorized into two sets: 1.) Elements within the package or personal perspectives the assessor applies to determine the presence of those desired characteristics or qualities 2.) Characteristics, qualities, or experiences the assessor is looking for the candidate to possess. The first of the two sets is titled “Assessor Applies” and looks generally at how the assessor evaluates. The second set, “Candidate Possesses”, generally addresses what the assessor is looking for.

The researcher sought to understand what standards, measures, perspectives and weights the assessors applies in their approach to rendering a determination. Table 4 displays a comparison of only those themes the assessor applies. There are ten. Further discussion of this comparison is provided in Chapter V.

TABLE 6. "ASSESSOR APPLIES" THEMES

**Assessor Applies**

Themes		Frequency Per Target Group				Total Frequency of Each Theme	Percentage of "Assessor Applies" Themes
		Senior Military (n=6)	Junior Military (n=6)	Civilians (n=5)	Supt. (n=1)		
2	Interpretation of subjective data/evidence	29	39	38	0	106	19.8%
1	Applies ideal - person fits current mold	34	30	18	3	85	15.9%
12	Consideration for cultural norms / social influence or trends acting on the board	22	22	34	2	80	15.0%
3	Imaginary line for selection standard	17	30	18	9	74	13.8%
4b	Focus: Elimination	25	16	11	1	53	9.9%
7a	Timeframe for success: Graduation	13	11	10	0	34	6.4%
4a	Focus: Selection	11	10	8	2	31	5.8%
11	Athletics as an indicator of leadership and character	9	13	6	2	30	5.6%
7b	Timeframe for success: Officer	8	8	6	4	26	4.9%
13	Self minimizing	2	9	5	0	16	3.0%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	170	188	154	23	535	100.0%

These ten of the eighteen (56%) themes were centered on how the assessor applies the tools, perspective, and experience at his or her disposal to evaluate moral identity. Themes are discussed in order from most to least frequently referenced in the interviews. Provided is a discussion on each theme in this set.

**Theme #2. Interpretation of subjective data/evidence**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	29	4.8	2.71	10.2%	
Junior Military (n=6)	39	6.5	5.89	12.7%	19.8%
Civilian (n=5)	38	7.6	5.41	16.7%	
Superintendent (n=1)	0	N/A	N/A	0.0%	

This theme postulates that the message of recommendation letters and other subjective data is perceived to be conveyed in an implicit manner. The assessor is required to “read between the lines” using his/her own framework to interpret the data.

The Superintendent does not sit on the Admissions Board and thus does not read individual applicant packages. Not surprisingly, he makes no reference of this theme. Among all other assessors, who do sit on the admissions board, the theme was the most prevalent. Each assessor referenced it at least twice during the course of the interview.

During the interview the assessor would say,

But it’ll be subtle things like, ‘he usually submits his work on time’ is their way of saying that quite often he doesn’t. ‘He fits in with his peers for his morals and ethics.’ That’s actually a sort of negative...

The idea is that there exists a requirement for the assessor to interpret each piece of subjective data and that they may not be taken at face value if to be correctly considered.

Another assessor states,

...a high school teacher while they can comment about someone’s work ethic and sometimes about their character, they don’t necessarily know what we are looking for in a midshipman, they may think they do, but they don’t always have a great picture.

Here again, the assessor almost distrusts the subjective data that is presented. The data is considered, not a face value, but with an understanding that the author may think and write things about an applicant that the assessor would not. The assessor does not ignore this, but attempts to take it into account.

Regarding the personal statement of an applicant, an assessor observes,

And I think you always have to remember its their statement and so while you may see some of their personality and some of their character coming through in their statement, and you want to give them the benefit of the doubt, I know that young people can be deceptive, manipulative, this is what they're saying so it's their side of any story so you have to take it all with a grain of salt I think.

The assessor is clearly guarded with respect to the subjective data, almost to the point of completely discrediting it.

**Theme #1. Applies ideal – person fits current mold**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	34	5.7	3.56	12.0%	15.9%
Junior Military (n=6)	30	5.0	2.83	9.8%	
Civilian (n=5)	18	3.6	2.70	7.9%	
Superintendent (n=1)	3	N/A	N/A	9.7%	

In this theme, the assessor expresses preconceived notions of what an ideal midshipman should “look” like and attempts to determine if the applicant fits that mold. Applying this ideal can obviously be very powerful in rendering a determination regarding an applicant’s moral identity. Applying this theme with a holistic approach the board must ask itself two questions: 1.) What are our goals? 2.) Are we recreating the past or creating the future?

Some examples of this theme manifested are,

...and this is one where several different things didn't fit the mold

or

...they don't try, they don't fit into the mold, these are not the people we want.

The assessors sense they know exactly what it is they are looking for, portraying an almost cookie cutter approach. Again, if the two questions above are answered before applying these ideals, the determinations regarding applicants may be very desirable.

One assessor states,

I think some of those inner city kids will make phenomenal officers. They won't be your standard prim and proper ties always neat type of person that you tend to think of, but maybe they will...

Here the assessor demonstrates the elasticity of his ideal while none the less expressing that he indeed has a preconceived picture in his mind of what an applicant should look like.

**3. Theme #12. Consideration for cultural norms / social influence or trends acting on the board**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	22	3.7	2.42	7.8%	15.0%
Junior Military (n=6)	22	3.7	3.20	7.2%	
Civilian (n=5)	34	6.8	5.54	14.9%	
Superintendent (n=1)	2	N/A	N/A	6.5%	

Assessors give consideration to the cultural norms or societal influences acting on an applicant. The parameters for acceptable behavior appear to vary based on background. This theme also includes current events which shape the perspective of the assessor.

An example of a current event is,

We don't want to have to deal with anybody who is going to cause us that sort of problem. Given the sensitivities because of all the problems they've had at Air Force, I can understand that. I suspect that ten years ago people would not have been quite so dismissive as they were.

The assessor is attuned to what is going on around the Academy and even the political climate within which it is operating. Being sensitive to that affects the assessor's determinations of what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Cultural norms come to bear on decision making too. In this example, the assessor is referring to a NASS evaluation submitted by a third class midshipman on an applicant from England.

...I think I worked out here that it's actually a cultural issue. The third class is too young, I want to use the word immature but that has connotations of childishness and I don't mean that at all but in terms of worldliness, he's very immature and I just don't feel...he came from Taft school, its one of these prestigious prep school type things, I think it's a boarding school. So he, from there thinks that he knows everything about the world, the universe and everything and this very, she sounds very prim and proper and really is more English than American most of her life, girl comes across from what is an equally prim and proper prep school in London it turns out and he had this culture thing that he could not...from the way he talked I don't think he realized what he told me but I think it looked like he could not deal with this cultural difference.

It appears the assessor accounts for the cultural difference and makes allowances for it, overriding those who would not or could not recognize and appreciate the cultural differences.

Societal influences are often compensated for in the judgment of the assessor. One states,

So that's the main sort of things that I'm looking for in looking at will this guy be of good, reasonable moral standards. I do have to be aware though is that these are applicants here and their backgrounds, they are swamped, particularly the inner city kids and things like that, all around them lying, cheating, stealing is the normal way of life, that's business. And it's extraordinarily difficult for a young kid in that kind of environment to actually be honest so if we are looking at the poorer schools and things like that, I'm more willing to accept that kind of behavior because we can correct that here if the basic kernel of the kid is good, that he's just having to fit in with the peers around him.

The standard of what is acceptable is applied unevenly based on what circumstances in which the applicant is raised. Given complete knowledge of each applicant's circumstance, this would be considered by the researcher, a reasonable approach. The objective and subjective data does not provide complete knowledge of each background so this theme is applied by exception, only when knowledge of the background is known.

#### 4. Theme #3. Imaginary line for selection standard

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	17	2.8	1.60	6.0%	13.8%
Junior Military (n=6)	30	5.0	2.97	9.8%	
Civilian (n=5)	18	3.6	3.78	7.9%	
Superintendent (n=1)	4	N/A	N/A	12.9%	

The assessor draws upon a personal principle distinction or “line” to make determinations on moral character. Each member has in his or her mind an imaginary line which if crossed may qualify or disqualify. As will be addressed with the “Selection” and “Elimination” themes two different methodologies may be employed. Some assessors do not presume an applicant is morally qualified and are looking to see them cross this line, thus reaching moral qualification; other assessors do presume an applicant is morally qualified and are watching for applicants who cross the line (in the other direction) and become morally disqualified.

Some examples of each are provided.

So if we find someone who cheats on work, that could be a barrier to them coming to the Naval Academy.

The picture here is of a candidate who has crossed the line and become disqualified.

Regarding another applicant who has had a disciplinary problem in school,

The CRC usually calls the school or I guess the authorities or whoever to find out as much as they can about the case, talks to the kid and then if the committee decided that this is ok they may recommend a reduction in score or something. But allow him to compete and then the board reviews the case, or they decide that this is an infraction that they don’t want to deal with and they don’t anybody who has done this and so that’s the end of that.

Again, an applicant has crossed the line and become disqualified.

The clinical psychologist, as a CRC member talks about her “line” by saying,

...my experience and my 30 years as a clinical psychologist with very, very disturbed patients in very, very challenging settings is that its gets easier as you've seen a lot of cases to make up your own cut off point - a dime a dozen or oh my god.

For a psychologist with years of experience it may be easier for her to draw the line, but as the very statement asserts, each is trying to make up his or her own point or line.

An example of crossing the line to qualification,

...the BGO says....I've known this kid for ten years an watched him or her grow and I saw the divorce of the parents or the death of a grandfather or something like that and the kid survived it and is doing really, really well. To me that's a helper, a positive.

In this case its life experiences that have produced and caused display of moral character, helping the applicant over the line.

**5. Theme #4b. Focus: Elimination**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	25	4.2	1.60	8.8%	9.9%
Junior Military (n=6)	16	2.7	1.21	5.2%	
Civilian (n=5)	11	2.2	1.92	4.8%	
Superintendent (n=1)	1	N/A	N/A	3.2%	

This theme will be contrasted to the “Focus: Selection” theme in a discussion found near the end of this chapter. Discussion here addresses similarities and differences within the “Focus: Elimination” theme; the assessor focuses on reasons to eliminate an applicant (i.e., glass half empty approach). From the pool of applicants, the assumption is that all are of desirable moral character unless something negative is discovered which screens the applicant out or eliminates him.

Sample statements from the interviews illustrating this theme include:

...because of that person's character, I would not want to serve with that individual

or

(admission) is almost like a by exception basis. You know a bad one when you get it. But do you know you have a right one? I don't know. You hope you do. But the bad ones you can find. So I think.

In both these examples the assessors is not focused on the character which they want to bring to the Naval Academy, but instead on what types of character they don't want to bring.

Another assessor states,

...obviously we screen out people who have had police records and things, I'm not sure, we may do that a bit too perfunctorily because I know people learn a lot through experiences but then again, we have so many good candidates that we don't have to put up with it, you know.

Here the assessor addresses the main challenge of using this elimination focus, and that is, what is the elimination criterion?

**6. Theme #7a. Timeframe for success: Graduation**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	13	2.2	1.47	4.6%	6.4%
Junior Military (n=6)	11	1.8	1.60	3.6%	
Civilian (n=5)	10	2.0	2.12	4.4%	
Superintendent (n=1)	0	N/A	N/A	0.0%	

The assessor bases qualification for admission on the applicant's propensity and likelihood of graduating from the Naval Academy. Later in this chapter this theme will be contrasted with the assessor basing his decision on officer potential as a measure for success. Here discussion centers on what timeframe the assessor uses for determining whether or not a successful decision was made with regard to an applicant. If the applicant graduates, the assessor considers his determination a correct one.

If the USNA Mission Statement is guiding the admissions board and its stated purpose is to "provide graduates who are dedicated o a career of naval service and have

potential for future development....”<sup>54</sup>, then the underlying assumption of this theme is that every applicant who graduates from the Naval Academy, will be a good officer.

A somewhat subtle example from the interviews is,

We shouldn’t be setting the same standards for entry as we are for graduation.

The assessor is acknowledging that the admissions board is not appointing Naval Academy graduates to the incoming class. The timeframe for success used by the assessor however, is not assignment to the fleet as a commissioned officer, but rather a midshipman who has made it to graduation.

A more manifest example states,

So we get all kinds of people who, you look at them and maybe their academic records aren’t as strong as somebody else you see but you look at them and you know that person had got a great background and you know that person is somebody that would be a great addition to the brigade of midshipmen....

The assessor is focused on how well the applicant would do within the brigade of midshipmen, not how they would fair as a commissioned officer in the fleet.

#### 7. Theme #4a. Focus: Selection

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	11	1.8	2.32	3.9%	5.8%
Junior Military (n=6)	10	1.7	0.82	3.3%	
Civilian (n=5)	8	1.6	1.14	3.5%	
Superintendent (n=1)	2	N/A	N/A	6.5%	

For this theme, the assessor’s focus is on finding reasons to qualify or select an applicant (i.e., glass half full approach). The mindset is one of differentiating the good from the best applicants. This is the first of the “Assessor Applies” themes where the

<sup>54</sup> Mission of the United States Naval Academy (p.7). *Reefpoints*. Annapolis: Naval Institute.

frequency average has dropped below two times per interview. This could be because it's simply easier to focus on eliminating applicants.

An example of this theme;

...what you hope is that you select the kids that have the foundation so that morally ethically you can develop them.

The assessor is seeking to identify those with a foundation from which to build. The assessor does not presume that because an applicant submitted an application package that he or she possesses the requisite moral foundation from which to build.

Another assessor, regarding the admissions board states,

I think they do about as good a job as you can do in admitting the kids with the highest moral values. I think there is a limitation, number one we want to bring in people with excellent moral character, we're chartered to do that by law and the admission aboard I think, does it very, very seriously.

The limitation the assessor references is the law itself, Title 10, requiring good moral character as stated in chapter two.

**8. Theme #11. Athletics as an indicator of leadership and character**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	9	1.5	1.64	3.2%	5.6%
Junior Military (n=6)	13	2.2	1.72	4.2%	
Civilian (n=5)	6	1.2	1.79	2.6%	
Superintendent (n=1)	2	N/A	N/A	6.5%	

Participation in athletics at the varsity level is believed by the assessor to be a strong indicator of leadership abilities and character development. The character qualities and virtues that an applicant attains through varsity sports are the same character qualities and virtues the admissions board is looking for in applicants.

For example,

What you tend to learn in athletics is that it's teamwork and you learn determination and keeping going when the chips are down and the score is against you and there's not chance to win and you keep fighting anyway.

The assessor draws parallel and translates character on the playing field to character on the battlefield. The same perseverance, tenacity and desire to win are required.

Another assessor speaks to the indoctrination training they receive when first being appointed to the Admissions Board. She states,

Guys who are ROTC and don't do sports tend not to be as successful; guys who play varsity athletics tend to be the most successful at the Naval Academy, we get a lot of that stuff so that we can kind of piece together what a strong candidate looks like.

Certainly from the statistics being presented to the admissions board members during their training, it is clear that being a varsity athlete is considered a requisite for being a "strong candidate."

**9. Theme #7b. Timeframe for success: Officer**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	8	1.3	1.21	2.8%	4.9%
Junior Military (n=6)	8	1.3	1.75	2.6%	
Civilian (n=5)	6	1.2	1.30	2.6%	
Superintendent (n=1)	4	N/A	N/A	12.9%	

The assessor bases qualification for admission on the applicant's propensity and likelihood of being a capable naval officer. This theme was referenced infrequently and with high standard deviation figures but was retained within the research data for the purpose of contrasting it with Theme #7a. (Timeframe for success: Graduation). The two themes are compared later in this chapter. The emphasis given this theme by the Superintendent relative to the other target groups provides for interesting discussion.

A key example is,

...my concern is how do I mold the admission process to end up with the kinds of officers that I need four or five years after graduation...

**10. Theme #13. Self Minimizing**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	2	0.3	0.52	0.7%	3.0%
Junior Military (n=6)	9	1.5	1.22	2.9%	
Civilian (n=5)	5	1.0	1.73	2.2%	
Superintendent (n=1)	0	N/A	N/A	0.0%	

To self minimize, the assessor discounts his or her qualifications or ability to make determinations with regard to an applicant’s moral identity. The research included this theme as a discussion point not because the data supports its validity, but because of comments made before and after the course of interview. The overwhelming majority of admission board and CRC members expressed a sense of not being fully qualified to do the work or made reference their limited experience and time on the board.

An example of self-minimalizing during the course of the interviews include,  
 ...maybe I’m not looking at the right things.

When asked what values the admission board draws on to make determinations, one assessor answered,

...my experience as an officer, knowing what the expectations are and knowing what’s acceptable and what is not acceptable. I think everyone comes in with their own values and we hope they are good values based on our selection process and for myself, I think they are fine...

Expressed is a lack of total confidence in the values of the other assessors. The process for selecting assessors is not within the scope of this research but certainly impacts final determinations and will be cited for potential future research.

**F. “CANDIDATE POSSESSES” THEMES**

The second of the two sets of themes are those which demonstrate the characteristics, qualities, or experiences the assessor is looking for the candidate to possess. These include personal characteristics, experiences, focuses and knowledge which the candidate may possess. The attention of the researcher is not on “how” the

assessor is evaluating, but on “what” is he evaluating. Table 5 depicts the data relating. Further discussion of the table is provided in Chapter five.

**TABLE 7. “CANDIDATE POSSESSES” THEMES**

		Candidate Possesses				Total Freq. of Each Theme	% of "Assessor Applies" Themes
Themes		Frequency Per Target Group					
		Senior Military (n=6)	Junior Military (n=6)	Civilian (n=5)	Supt. (n=1)		
10b	Personal Characteristics: Truthfulness	29	23	11	3	66	20.8%
9	Focus on others	19	22	19	2	62	19.5%
5	Response / reaction / learning from moral failure	16	22	10	2	50	15.7%
6	Knowledge of commitment / responsibility, understands what is involved	15	14	9	2	40	12.6%
10d	Personal Characteristics: Motivation	8	15	9	2	34	10.7%
8	Unique Experience	14	6	9	2	31	9.7%
10a	Personal Characteristics: Sincerity	8	10	6	0	24	7.5%
10c	Personal Characteristics: Respect (for authority)	4	6	1	0	11	3.5%
	TOTAL	113	118	74	13	318	100.0%

Eight of the eighteen (44%) themes were centered on what characteristics, qualities, focus and experience the assessors thought an applicant should possess. Provided is a review of those themes and how each of the three groups (senior military,

junior military & civilians) viewed each one. Themes are discussed in order from most to least frequently referenced in the interviews.

**1. Theme #10b. Personal Characteristics: Truthfulness**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Candidate Possesses" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	29	4.8	2.79	10.2%	20.8%
Junior Military (n=6)	23	3.8	2.04	7.5%	
Civilian (n=5)	11	2.2	1.64	4.8%	
Superintendent (n=1)	3	N/A	N/A	9.7%	

The candidate displays the character trait of truthfulness. This theme accounts for one of every five comments an assessor made with regard to what they were looking for, regarding moral identity, in an applicant. There is a paradox when evaluating an applicant on paper or otherwise: they may either be very honest, or a very good liar. The paradox notwithstanding, the data indicates that truthfulness is the most desired moral characteristics sought after by the admissions board.

The following quote is from an assessor relating truthfulness to his time in the fleet and then he transfers the applications of his dialogue to a candidate filling out his application package.

So we've got to be extremely forthcoming. You've got to bear your soul and tell the truth as it happens. You also have to never, ever lie...when you're queried about something that you're not doing well in, you have to be extremely forthcoming...so if you don't get that full disclosure, what I've been referring to as being forthcoming, and you don't get this total honesty, you're going to have a problem. In the application packages, they have a series of forms to fill out and they have to be precise for us to know, but I will tell you, it would be easy for someone to cheat in filling in the blanks...

One observation concludes that assessors who share these perceptions must rely heavily on subjective data from sources other than the applicant to determine if he or she possesses truthfulness.

When asked how he weighs the past moral failure of an applicant, one assessor responded,

Another variable that I bring into the consideration is whether the midshipmen candidate brings this incident to the attention of the BGO, to the Admissions Board, in his application package or basically does it have to be pried out of him. If he or she is straightforward and brings it to the attention of the Board members or the admissions package.

The point made is that honesty or truthfulness, in not trying to cover up an incident, may at times offset or trump the adverse impact of an applicant’s moral failure.

**2. Theme #9. Focus on others**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Candidate Possesses" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	19	3.2	3.06	6.7%	19.5%
Junior Military (n=6)	22	3.7	1.21	7.2%	
Civilian (n=5)	19	3.8	3.03	8.3%	
Superintendent (n=1)	2	N/A	N/A	6.5%	

This theme defined as: the candidate possesses a healthy outward focus and displays genuine, active concern for others and meeting their needs. There is a quality of teamwork and trust implicit to this theme. A selfish individual can not, in the longer run, help an group reach it’s full potential. In an institution such as the Naval Academy, with many high performing individuals and predominately type “A” personalities, a healthy sense of selflessness if valued.

When asked what he liked about a particular applicant, the assessor responded,

...although he did not have a father figure in his household, he was forced to grow up at a young age to provide leadership and guidance to his siblings...

From this statement one can surmise that the applicant possessed leadership abilities, but just as important if not more, those abilities were focused and developed

while serving others. Those character qualities would not have come to light or been developed if the applicant would have been an only child. Assessors like servant leaders.

Speaking of a reckless incident involving an applicant and an inexperienced driver, one assessor notes,

I at that point had adopted this notion that what we're looking for in terms of the character of the individual includes their understanding of their own motivation and some acknowledgement that perhaps they lack empathy and here's what the empathic thing would have been in the original event or to make reparation. My feeling about this candidate was he had absolutely no insight into the fact that the very prank, as he kept calling it, that he had in mind could endanger lives. Never once acknowledged, 'oh what a lucky escape that only the car was seriously hurt.' Never once acknowledged that about the fact that this was very traumatic thing to do to a sixteen year old.

Just as a healthy focus on others may endear an applicant, lack thereof may be found significantly discrediting.

**3. Theme #5. Response / reaction / learning from moral failure**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Candidate Possesses" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	16	2.7	1.51	5.7%	15.7%
Junior Military (n=6)	22	3.7	3.44	7.2%	
Civilian (n=5)	10	2.0	2.55	4.4%	
Superintendent (n=1)	2	N/A	N/A	6.5%	

This theme was defined by the researcher as: considers ensuing applicant's actions and attitudes with regard to a moral failure as cause to screen in or out. The candidate either possesses the right response and attitudes, or the wrong ones. As an applicant who was caught stealing a CD in ninth grade asks, "Will this hurt my chances for admission?" This theme largely provides the answer. Certainly there are felonies which cross the "imaginary line" discussed in Theme #3, but generally applicants do have a chance to recover from most moral failures as data supporting this theme clearly demonstrates.

One assessor related,

And if it is one of social use (marijuana) and if self-reported, nobody else has commented on it, then actually I tend to think that, that is more of a plus than the person that we don't know about that hid it.

A right response, in this case truthfulness, to a moral failure actually helps screen the candidate in.

Another assessor discusses an applicant's response to a moral failure,

And you feel as though there is genuine remorse and to me someone who has been called out doing something and recognize they've been called out or sometimes they are just self admitting, they got called out and then suddenly realized what could have been the consequences, I think that sets them up to be a better person down the line. Probably better than the person who's never in their life lied, cheated or stole if they were ever around here some where. I just feel as though they've learned something from what the potential consequences really are when you've stood at the edge of the cliff hanging on even though it's a long way down, but if you're always fifteen feet away from the cliff you don't know how far it is down.

The assessor here is actually looking for learning to have taken place from a moral failure and when he sees that, it provides justification for morally screening the applicant in. Without a moral failure to learn from, the assessor believes there is a lack of understanding with respect to consequences and life experience, and so this failure is necessary to be considered a person of sound moral identity.

**4. Theme #6. Knowledge of commitment / responsibility, understand what is involved**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Candidate Possesses" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	15	2.5	2.17	5.3%	12.6%
Junior Military (n=6)	14	2.3	1.21	4.6%	
Civilian (n=5)	9	1.8	1.92	3.9%	
Superintendent (n=1)	2	N/A	N/A	6.5%	

The assessor seeks to weed out applicants who are uncertain of the commitment, the desired direction for their lives, or what values they ascribe to. If the assessor senses

that the applicant has no serious direction in life or no moral compass to guide him, the assessor will likely question the moral decision making ability of the applicant.

Speaking favorably of an applicant, an assessor stated

...he's talking about knowledge, understanding, loyalty skills, those sorts of things and you feel as though he's got an awareness of what the Academy is.

For the vast majority of young Americans, the lifestyle of the Naval Academy is a culture shock. If a midshipman's desire to succeed is not stemming from a full knowledge of the total level of commitment required, that applicant will likely be disillusioned upon entry. If an applicant is not firmly grounded in his or her convictions and sense of right and wrong, they will be tempted to do whatever they can to succeed in this high stress environment.

Assessors want to determine who will succeed as a midshipman or future officer. An applicant's display of purpose and conviction is viewed in a most favorable light while an application submitted half-heartedly is frowned upon. One assessor when asked about how he viewed an applicant's moral failure responded,

The first thing that I look for is when did it actually happen because most of these kids that are applying have been applying for quite some time and have quite a desire to come here so if we get their package in September and they get busted for drugs in November, then are you kidding me!?

Once an applicant knows what moral character is expected of a midshipman, the assessor expects to see that same moral character mimicked in the life of the applicant if the applicant is serious about attending. If an applicant has no knowledge of what is expected, the assessor extends more grace on the theory that, once an applicant does know what is expected, he will desire to conform to that standard.

**5. Theme #10.d Personal Characteristics: Motivation**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Candidate Possesses" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	8	1.3	1.03	2.8%	10.7%
Junior Military (n=6)	15	2.5	3.83	4.9%	
Civilian (n=5)	9	1.8	1.64	3.9%	
Superintendent (n=1)	2	N/A	N/A	6.5%	

For this theme, the candidate displays the character trait of motivation or perseverance. Similar to other traits, motivation may work in favor of screening and applicant in, just as lack of motivation may work to screen out. The level of initiative and energy that is required to be a good midshipman and later a good officer is substantial. Fourteen of the eighteen assessors interviewed, referenced this theme at least once. For example,

...but he is not going to stop until he accomplishes his goals.

The assessor's impression of the applicant is that no matter what happens, he will meet with success. This applicant will climb any ladder set before him and not give up until he's reached the top. Motivation in subordinates breeds confidence in seniors. Another display of the theme,

...a lot of the times when I see high SAT scores and low grades that is an indicator to me of someone who is underachieving. And to me that is an indication of someone who is not challenging themselves to their fullest, who doesn't have a full respect for what this institution is...

The assessor feels that an applicant, who isn't putting forth their best effort to get accepted here, isn't deserving, regardless of ability. The lack of motivation to put forth one's best effort, ends up screening out those who don't possess it.

## 6. Theme #8. Unique Experience

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Candidate Possesses" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	14	2.3	2.07	4.9%	9.7%
Junior Military (n=6)	6	1.0	1.26	2.0%	
Civilian (n=5)	9	1.8	2.49	3.9%	
Superintendent (n=1)	2	N/A	N/A	6.5%	

The assessor considers unique experiences as uniquely qualifying. Usually the experience is societal or family related (ex. being raised without a father figure or raised traveling abroad). Implied within this theme is that one who has a unique life experience, is generally more mature than his or her peer group. For example,

...a female candidate who in addition to having lived abroad had organized food drives....that impressed the board as being something really unusual.

The military has always attempted to cultivate within its' ranks is an ability to think out of the "box." When an applicant is doing something very unusual, the assessor associates that with original thinking, maturity and one who is secure in themselves. Another example is provided by an assessor when he was asked what about an applicants who possess sound moral identity,

Occasionally you'll find someone who has, because the family has fallen apart from death or divorce or whatever has taken on a leadership role or provider ship for siblings occasionally caring for a relative, a sibling or someone who is ill. That's where I think you'll find some of those.

or

I remember one kid who sometime in ninth grade or tenth grade, his parents sold their house and bought a sail boat and for the next three years the kid was basically a deck hand on the boat and being home schooled by his parents, but he had this wonderful experience growing up.

There is something about a unique experience that causes the application package to appear very genuine to the assessor. The researcher noted that as assessors related

various unique experiences of applicants, the assessor's tone and demeanor would increase in enthusiasm and become very sincere.

**7. Theme #10a. Personal Characteristics: Sincerity**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Candidate Possesses" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	8	1.3	2.42	2.8%	7.5%
Junior Military (n=6)	10	1.7	0.82	3.3%	
Civilian (n=5)	6	1.2	1.79	2.6%	
Superintendent (n=1)	0	N/A	N/A	0.0%	

The candidate displays the character trait of sincerity. For example, one assessor stated,

What I liked about that personal statement that that young man made was that it seemed to be very, very sincere...

**8. Theme #10c. Personal Characteristics: Respect (for authority)**

Target Group	Total Frequency	Average Frequency / Assessor	Standard Deviation	% Frequency of all Themes by Target Group	% Frequency of "Candidate Possesses" Themes
Senior Military (n=6)	4	0.7	0.82	1.4%	3.5%
Junior Military (n=6)	6	1.0	1.26	2.0%	
Civilian (n=5)	1	0.2	0.45	0.4%	
Superintendent (n=1)	0	N/A	N/A	0.0%	

The applicant possesses the character trait of respect (for authority). This theme was originally chosen because it was well represented in the sub samples selected when creating the initial codebook. As the remainder of the interviews were coded, and then data analysis conducted, it became apparent that this was not a theme impacting the determinations of assessors. Eight of the eighteen assessors made no mention of it, and only three assessors, one from each group, addressed it more than two times.

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## V. DISCUSSION

### A. INTRODUCTION INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This thesis seeks to offer valuable insight into the thoughts and feelings of *Admissions Board and Character Review Committee Members*. Each was asked for their perspective on how or if the moral identity of an applicant is evaluated. Responses revealed emergent themes which may be categorized into two sets: 1.) Characteristics, qualities, or experiences the assessor is looking for the candidate to possess 2.) Elements within the package or personal perspectives the assessor applies to determine the presence of those desired characteristics or qualities.

The observations presented in this chapter were given in response to the protocol listed in the appendix. Although many of the member's thoughts, stories, and opinions are offered, none are presented as the "right" answer of how best to evaluate an applicant's moral character. The reason for assembling a twelve member admissions board is to encompass as many thoughts, perspectives, and considerations as practical in hopes to somehow, as a whole, gain the insights necessary to make a moral determination with respect to an applicant.

The study is limited solely to Admission's Board and CRC *perspectives* about how best and what to evaluate. This research does not does not address any of the varying applicant approaches to filling out the application package, nor does it consider the varying approaches used by those who write letters of recommendation or conduct Blue and Gold Officer interviews. For example, there is no form letter for a Guidance Counselor to work from as he or she writes a letter of recommendation for the applicant. Clearly the quality and content of these inputs can potentially have considerable impact on an assessor's determination.

The two main sections of this chapter discuss from the data, "how" and "what" an assessor evaluates to make a determination. As discussed in Chapter IV, the first of the two sections is titled "Assessor Applies" and looks generally at how the assessor evaluates. The second section, "Candidate Possesses", generally addresses what the

assessor is looking for. Within these sections, themes from the codebook are listed, explained, and illustrated with Admission Board and CRC member's quotes.

## **B. ASSESSOR APPLIES**

### **1. Interpretation of Subjective Data**

Many letters of recommendation are authored by individuals who want to support the applicant, but do not want to compromise their integrity. A crossroads appears as they sit to write a recommendation for an applicant who they surmise is not best suited for the Naval Academy. Words are carefully chosen so as not to darken an applicant's character, yet not compromise their own assessment of the applicant; a mixed signal is intended to be sent.

Among the target groups, the theme is cited over 50% more frequently by civilians than senior military members. The implication being that senior military members are more likely to take letters of recommendation and other subjective materials at face value, rather than attempt to interpret what the author may have been attempting to convey. This conclusion regarding the senior military members is further supported by the fact that the standard deviation across their target group is notably lower than the other groups.

Civilians have better insight or are at least more alert to what is meant, by the way in which it was written. Senior military members are coached to use "bottom line writing" in their correspondence, which requires a very direct, concise transmission of thoughts. Brief training, with input from the civilians, may surface this theme among the assessors and generate a consciousness regarding it.

### **2. Applies Ideal – Person Fits Current Mold**

Overlaying this ideal on each applicant can obviously be very powerful in rendering a determination regarding an applicant's moral character. Applying this theme with a holistic approach the board must ask itself two questions: 1.) What are our goals? 2.) Are we recreating the past or creating the future? This is not to infer that recreating the past will necessarily produce suboptimal results, but rather that applying this ideal should be done purposefully.

Opposite the previous theme, this theme was cited 50% more frequently by senior military than civilians. Senior military draw from their years of having witnessed

thousands of sailors and Marines both succeed and fail. Understandably it is the senior military who have most clearly formed an ideal in their mind's eye. All assessors would benefit from consciously considering what mold they are applying.

### **3. Consideration for Cultural Norms / Societal Influence or Trends Acting on the Board**

Decisively, the civilian group is more sensitive to these considerations than the military groups. If the researcher discards the highest civilian member's frequency (16) from the group, the standard deviation drops to 2.06 and the average to 4.5, an average which is still markedly higher than the other target groups. It is a major factor in civilian decision making.

Knowing an applicant's gender, ethnicity and address can not reveal all there is to know about the societal influences at work in an applicant's life. Many times these influences will be expressed in a Blue and Gold interview or letter of recommendation, but many times they will not be. For example, if an inner city youth is honest enough to admit experimenting with marijuana, there may be a propensity toward leniency and understanding given his surroundings; a degree of grace may be extended by some assessors. However, if a youth from wealth and a private high school education also admits to marijuana use, the propensity to extend that same grace may be lesser. Now what if the same scenario was presented, but only one youth's background was known? Would the board's discussion and ultimate determination be the same? While I acknowledge that it is healthy for assessors to consider this background information, it is also understood that for fair evaluation, the information should be symmetrical across the applicant pool...and it is not.

Immersed in the military mindset and culture, it stands to reason that the military assessors would be less concerned with and perhaps less accepting of varying cultural and societal behaviors. Military boot camps and plebe summer are designed to transform "the input" into conforming, yet creative thinking professionals. This theme, more than any other, impacts the potential for affecting diversity within the officer corps. Consideration for cultural norms and societal influences must be applied judiciously.

The other piece to this theme is the "trends of the day" which are acting on the Admissions Board. Currently, because of the media coverage the Air Force Academy is

receiving over their sexual assault scandal, the Admissions Board will not long consider an applicant who has any history of sexual misconduct in his or her application. I suspect that in 1995 after the electrical engineering cheating scandal broke at the Naval Academy, the Admissions Board was acutely aware of any applicant who had been caught cheating in high school. In order to keep in the Naval Academy in the good graces of the American peoples, it is commendable and right for the Admission Board to keep its finger on the pulse of the cultural climate.

#### **4. Imaginary Line for Selection Standard**

The frequency among the five civilians ranged from 9 to 0. For those who did not reference this theme, one explanation may be that they are so accepting of most any moral behavior that they really don't draw a line of what is morally unacceptable short of a felony conviction. For example, some assessors do not have reservations about admitting applicants who have been caught smoking marijuana. The assessors believe in the character development program here at the Naval Academy and its' ability to "imbue midshipmen with the highest ideals of duty, honor and loyalty..."<sup>55</sup> These assessors believe that if the applicant can pass the academic rigors, then he or she will be a morally developed while they are here.

The inference is that an individual's ability to develop morally is not limited in the manner one's cognitive aptitude is. All applicants possess the propensity to live up the "special trust and confidence" bestowed upon officers. Generally, so long as there is no repeated history of misdemeanors or felony offenses, most all applicants are morally acceptable. On the other hand, it is believed that if an applicant has not demonstrated an ability to grasp the mathematical concepts presented on the SAT tests, then he or she will not be capable of completing the technical course of study at the Naval Academy.

Junior officers referenced this theme almost twice as much on average as the senior officers. Junior officers on board the Naval Academy are generally assigned to billets in Bancroft Hall dealing primarily with midshipmen throughout the day. They spend a good portion of their time dealing with certain midshipmen who are constantly finding themselves in conduct trouble. The junior officers most feel the pain of a morally

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<sup>55</sup> Mission of the United States Naval Academy (p.7). *Reefpoints*. Annapolis: Naval Institute.

misguided determination by the Admissions Board. Thus, Junior Officers are least likely to trust the character development programs to reshape a “bad apple.”

This standard may be applied by an assessor who is taking either an elimination or selection focus. If the assessor considers the entire applicant pool to be of sound moral character, then he or she is eliminating only those who cross over the imaginary line, disqualifying themselves. If an assessor does not presume the applicant pool to be of sound moral character, then he or she is selecting those who cross over the line to become qualified. The data shows that junior officers most consistently focus on selection of the three groups.

#### **5. Focus: Elimination**

Senior military officers maintain this focus nearly twice as much on average as civilians and 50% more than junior military. Having likely sat as members of promotion boards, senior officers may apply the promotion board mentality which also tends to focus on eliminating. At promotion boards, the vast majority of the officers being reviewed for promotion are qualified and even deserving of promotion, but not all may be promoted. The officers who sit on those boards could select any one of a number of those eligible. The task becomes easier if the field to choose from is narrowed, by increasing the promotion criteria. As was observed in the “Applies Ideal” theme, the senior officers try to find applicants who fit the mold and then eliminate those who don’t.

Civilians are the most accepting or perhaps least critical of an applicant’s record. As civilians were the least likely to have an “Imaginary Line for Selection Standard”, logically, they would have the most difficult time finding grounds for elimination. At first glance, eliminating (compared to selecting) is the most honest, efficient way of going about the appointment process. It is understood that essentially what the Admissions Board does is qualify applicants from which the congressional nomination bodies select. By selecting however, it allows the Admissions Board to best identify those applicants who should be sent to a foundation school or NAPS in the event that they do not receive a congressional nomination. Selecting ensures the best applicants are given multiple avenues to attend and curbs the negative effects of any politics that may play out in the congressional nomination process.

## **6. Timeframe for Success: Graduation**

The data shows very little variation in the frequency of this theme across the target groups. Within each target group the standard deviation suggests that assessors tend to focus on either graduation or officer performance as a measure for success. More discussion of this comparison is provided at the end of this chapter.

## **7. Focus: Selection**

The structure of the appointment process is such that the admissions board is actually qualifying applicants for politicians to nominate from. The admissions board members realize this, so their sense of ultimately selecting the best qualified candidates can be at times, somewhat stifled. A number of the assessors expressed frustration with the system structured the way it is for the very reason that they do not have the final say in who actually receives an appointment.

An example of this is,

Sometime if I were to look at ten candidates, the principle may be the weakest person who we would say they have at least the minimum amount of moral character but they might not be the best kid on that particular slate (or congressional district) because we are required by law to take them. But on those slates where we have an option to do it, I think we end up taking the best kids.

For reasons stated in the “Imaginary Line” theme, junior officers most consistently focus on selection, but the difference in average frequency between the groups is too negligible to draw out differences. Section “D” of this chapter will further address the similarities and differences of selection vs. elimination.

## **8. Athletics as an Indicator for Leadership and Character**

The Superintendent best summarized why athletics are believed to be an indicator for leadership and character.

What you tend to learn in athletics is that it's teamwork and you learn determination and keeping going when the chips are down and the score is against you and there's no chance to win and you keep fighting anyway. We don't want our kids to learn it's OK to lose, we want them to learn what it takes to win and you can't just walk out on the field or on the court and expect to win, you've got to prepare for years, sometimes very intense training and preparation to have a chance to win and then you're still not sure you're going to win. It's the determination and spirit and all that comes into it. If you haven't done your homework, you're going to be

blown away and that's true in battle to, same translation, if you haven't prepared and done everything you can to get ready, your chances of winning are way down, although you're still not guaranteed that you're not going to win but at least you've got a change to do it.

While briefing an applicant during the Admissions Board, it is always noted if one was "slick sports" or did not participate in varsity sports. If an applicant was "slick sports" an explanation was expected as to what he or she was doing with their free time. In the absence of a valid reason, the applicant was generally looked upon unfavorably. Athletics indicates character and leadership and physical fitness.

Half of the senior military target group and 60% of the civilians did not address this theme at all in their interviews. Many times during the interviews as athletics was mentioned, the researcher did not code it because athletics was referring to the candidate's physical qualification and not in the context of contributing to his or her moral character.

The reason that nearly half of the assessors did not address athletics as an indicator of leadership and character could be because they don't believe it is. Athletic participation is obviously an indicator of an applicant's physical fitness and thus gets a thorough briefing at the admissions boards. The data suggests that many of the assessors do not look at athletics as the Superintendent does - as an indicator of character.

One assessor, who did reference athletics, caveated its character indicating value by noting that it was not merely enough to be involved in a varsity sports, the applicant needed to be involved in a leadership role within the team. The display of ownership and responsibility for outcome is admirable and indeed reflects great character. As reflected in the data, the Admissions Board is doing a very good job of not perfunctorily associating athletics with character.

## **9. Timeframe for Success: Officer**

The Superintendent's timeframe for success is unmistakable; he refers to this theme (four times) more than any other in his interview. As he writes the annual guidance to the admissions board, he is projecting the needs of the future, and aiming to address them in the present. The Superintendent also states with respect to the admissions board,

Well, from my perspective, (it) comes down to what are we trying to accomplish for the Navy and Marine Corps.

Again, he is not simply looking for applicants who have the potential abilities to graduate from the Naval Academy. Other assessors across the groups refer to this theme infrequently. The importance of this theme has not been impressed to the assessors, likely because whichever timeframe for success they apply has little effect on final determinations. More discussion on this theme is provided later in this chapter when it is compared to “Timeframe for Success: Officer.”

#### **10. Self-Minimizing**

Given this information, it appears that an assessor may self-minimalize for one of two reasons too bold. First, they don’t fully understand how or why they were appointed to the Admissions Board or CRC. Second, because they sensationalize the weight of this responsibility. Indeed it is a great responsibility and an honor to be selected to serve in this capacity. An assessor interview process of some type is recommended, not to screen potential assessors who may be assigned, but to stamp out any self minimalizing thoughts assessors may bring to the table.

This theme has the potential to effect determinations on moral character. If an assessor is not confident in his moral judgment and abilities, he may be swayed by others on the board. Determinations on difficult cases may be made by just a few on the board who know how to influence. Assessors must not become bound by indecision or at any time lose confidence in their own decision making abilities. It is the diversity of the Admissions Board, and variety of perspectives which gives it its’ strength.

### **C. CANDIDATE POSSESSES**

#### **1. Personal Characteristic: Truthfulness**

The data indicates that the value placed on truthfulness increases with military experience. It stands to reason that senior military, who have more personnel working for them than junior officers or civilian faculty, see the need for truthfulness in subordinates most vividly. Also the fact that this is the number one characteristic assessors are seeking in an applicant, indicates that this may be one quality which can least be developed or instilled during the course of four years at the Naval Academy.

Given the weight placed on truthfulness, the data suggests that upon induction, if an applicant hasn't learned integrity during in the first eighteen years of his or her life, they will not learn it during the next four. Why else would it be so important to possess initially? Indeed, it is not like close order drill which is largely learned by making mistakes. One may not remain a midshipman or officer for any amount of time without integrity.

This theme is acknowledged twice as often among senior officers as civilians. Civilian assessors know academically what the honor concept is and what standard the midshipmen are expected to live up to. However, unless one has lived under that concept and actively held others to it in very personal ways, it is difficult to truly internalize its importance. As one senior officer stated, "Our lives depend on it (truthfulness)." There is a gap between how the two groups view this theme which should be closed. Members across the Admissions Board should seek out those individuals who have a steadfastness to tell the truth and to live a life marked only by truthfulness.

## **2. Focus on Others**

Interestingly the data shows that, opposite of truthfulness, this theme is valued slightly less with more military experience. A third of the senior military officers made no mention of this theme during their interviews. The junior military group reflects great consistency (lowest standard deviation) among the target groups perhaps best indicating that they value possession of this character trait most.

Teamwork is essential at all levels, but as officers rise in rank, their movements and tasking increase in autonomy. They still value teamwork, especially in their subordinates, but it may not be as important to them as it once was. Interestingly, there appears to be no association between this theme and athletics as an "indicator of leadership and character." This supports the postulate that there is not a connection in most assessors view, between athletics and moral character.

One of the first lessons that new midshipmen are taught is that no person can succeed alone. Exercises are designed throughout plebe summer to require sacrifice and teamwork. One of the first things that cadre pick up on during an applicants time at NASS is whether or not he or she can function within a team. A self absorbed individual will quickly find themselves alienated by the group and themselves become embittered.

Any insights, positive or negative, that the Admissions Board gleans with regard to an applicants focus on others should be weighed heavily.

### **3. Response / Reaction / Learning from Moral Failure**

Only the junior military officer target group consistently referenced this theme. Two of the civilians and two of the senior military assessors made no reference of an applicant's response to moral failure, while each of the groups also had one member who referenced it six or more times. The researcher has no postulates explaining the consistency or disparity in data among the groups. Being the third most frequent "Candidate Possesses" theme, it clearly does impact outcome and could not be overlooked.

### **4. Knowledge of Commitment / Responsibility, Knowing What is Involved**

This theme is least emphasized by the civilian target group who has the lowest frequency average and whose average is exceeded by its standard deviation. Interestingly, one member of this target group who referenced the theme five times during in the interview is a retired officer from the British Royal Navy. Without his frequency calculated in, the average for the group drops to one.

To expect full knowledge and commitment of an applicant, it is sensible that an assessor would themselves have to fully understand what that commitment is. It is awkward to be on the selection committee for such a life experience as you've never experienced. One thing that all assessors should acknowledge is that an applicant who thoroughly informs himself of what is expected, possesses a genuine interest in the program and has maturity enough not to foolishly embark on an endeavor they are not willing to complete.

Certainly what the Admissions Board is hoping to avoid, is giving an appointment to a half-hearted applicant. The extensive application process itself weeds out many who possess only a passing interest. For those who complete the application process, the Admissions Board is looking to detect the aspiration to a career of naval service. The Board knows full well that many graduates will not make a career of the naval service, however, if from the start, all an applicant wants is an education and some job experience for a resume, the motives with which they apply must be questioned.

## **5. Personal Characteristic: Motivation**

My initial expectation was that this theme would be most strongly represented within the junior officer target group. Those closest to the training desire motivation from the incoming trainees. One junior officer referenced the theme ten times in her interview, thus skewing the average. Without her frequency averaged in, the average for the junior officer group drops to one (1). This personal characteristic is not valued among any of the target groups.

One of the occurrences at the Naval Academy is that it takes seemingly big “fish” from small ponds and throws them into an ocean of talent. Not all survive, but among those who do, motivation or perseverance are common threads. This is probably the toughest theme to identify on paper, without actually speaking with an individual and observing facial expressions or tone inflection.

Motivation is also a measure of how hard an individual is trying to accomplish their goals. If an applicant is never or always reaching their goals, there is an issue with their level of motivation. They are either aspiring to accomplish too little or lack the motivation to accomplish too much. The BGO interviews should attempt to identify whether an applicant is working at maximum capacity or lacks the motivation to ever fail.

## **6. Unique Experience**

Six of the eleven civilians and junior officers made no mention of this theme while 86% of the senior officer group referenced it. Senior officers most value unique experiences. An unspoken principle states that unique experiences uniquely qualify applicants. Just as with one who possesses a “knowledge of the commitment”, there seems to be an underlying inference that an applicant who experiences something unique in life has maturity enough not to foolishly embark on an endeavor they are not willing and able to complete. Also that those with a unique life experience are less likely to take opportunities for granted because they realize first hand what it may be like for those in less fortunate circumstances.

There’s also an emotional force at play in this theme. The assessors who related stories of individuals who had survived unique or trying experiences, related the stories with a sense of sympathy, almost taking sides with the applicant, wanting to cheer them on to accomplish great things. The question is, do these unique experiences which

admittedly are great stories to relate around the water fountain, actually uniquely qualify one applicant over another? Every time an assessor becomes endeared to an applicant who has sailed around the world or been raised in a single family household, they need to honestly answer this question.

#### **7. Personal Characteristic: Sincerity**

Every member of the junior officer group alluded to this theme at least once. The junior officers are in closest contact with the midshipmen. One of the challenges they daily face at the Naval Academy is cynicism. Sincerity in an applicant is understandably valued most by junior officers and those working closest with the midshipmen. Junior officers need to be vocal when they spot this in an applicant and articulate it's value.

### **D. CONTRASTING THEMES**

#### **1. Theme 4a. Focus: Selection vs. Theme 4b. Focus: Elimination**

When it comes to evaluating an applicant package, do assessors look to eliminate applicants, select them, or both? The data provides some useful insight. Every assessor mentioned one of the two themes at least twice. Of the eighteen assessors four (22%) made reference to either select or eliminate, but not both. For these, the indication would be that they do attempt to either select or eliminate. Of those four, three cited eliminating exclusively and one cited selection.

Three assessors cited each of the themes the same number of times. No conclusions can be drawn about their tendency to select or eliminate without further research. Further research may include an examination on the types of candidates involved. For example, an assessor may tend to select from the pool of athletes and eliminate from those who require waivers for admission.

Of the remaining eleven assessors, seven show higher frequencies for elimination than selection. Among this group the frequency for elimination is 30, the frequency for selection is nine; over a 3:1 ratio. The strong tendency is toward elimination.

The four who have a higher frequency for selection than elimination reflected a much closer margin. Among this group the frequency for selection is 13, the frequency for elimination is seven; just under a 2:1 ratio.

Taken as a whole, I conclude that Admissions Board and CRC members have a strong propensity to eliminate, rather than select from the applicant pool. The sheer

volume of applicants which the Board has to evaluate favors this approach. However, the Admissions Board does designate certain strong applicants as RINO (Return if no Congressional Offer) so they may ensure an offer of a foundation school or NAPS is extended at the least. That process is very selection oriented and from what I observed, working effectively.

**2. Theme 7a. Timeframe for Success: Graduation vs. Theme 7b. Timeframe for Success: Officer**

When an assessor evaluates an applicant, are they seeking the talent that can most likely withstand the rigors of the Naval Academy experience, or are they focused on who will best serve as a leader in the fleet? Admittedly there must be a balance or perhaps the requirements between the Naval Academy and the fleet are not differentiated. A comparison of these two themes provides an understanding of the timeframe used to measure success.

Many fine officers with strong moral character gain commissions into the naval service through other accession sources. While many are gifted academically, most do not have the high school grades and SAT scores to competitively bid for an appointment to the Naval Academy. Is the Admissions Board forced to choose academics over strong moral identity because many with strong moral character do not possess the intellect to graduate? The vast majority of Naval Academy graduates never utilize their college major in the specialty they are assigned, but they do employ the lessons learned of leadership and character development because that is what is required of a naval officer.

Three (16%) of the eighteen assessors made no reference to either theme; one assessor made one reference to each theme. For these, the researcher is unable to tell which timeframe the assessors use to determine success. More research would be required.

Four assessors (22%) cited only graduation as the timeframe for success. The implication being, that if the applicant graduates from the Naval Academy, the Admissions Board has rendered the correct determination regarding their admission. Four others cite both themes, but have higher frequencies for graduation than officer. Of the four, their total frequency for the graduation metric is 14 while their frequency total for the officer metric is 7; exactly a 2:1 ratio in favor of the graduation metric.

Three assessors (16%) cite only success as an officer as a measure for success. The remaining three assessors cite both themes, but have higher frequencies for officer than graduation. Of the three, their total frequency for the officer metric is 10 while their frequency total for the graduation metric is six; nearly a 2:1 ratio in favor of the officer metric.

Overall frequency reflects the graduation metric was cited 34 times and the officer metric 26 times. Based on the analysis of the assessors, I was unable to verify that, as a body, they tend toward one of these themes over the other.

#### **E. LIMITATIONS**

The frequency data, contained in Table 4 and Table 5, is inconclusive due to a variety of factors. The small sample size revealed high frequencies for certain members and low frequencies for others within the same target group. This makes interpretation somewhat difficult. For example, theme 10d. *personal characteristic: motivation*, had an average frequency of 2.5 for the six members of the junior military target group, however, the standard deviation was 3.83. Discarding the data of the member with the highest frequency brought the average of the group down to 1.0 with a standard deviation of 1.10. However, if one member on the Admissions Board is that passionate about the personal characteristic of motivation, chances are, that during the discussion of an applicant who possesses this characteristic, the outlying assessor's strong sense of value for the theme may well sway the opinions of the other assessors in favor of the applicant with this strength. There is a group dynamic at play which can not be captured by this data.

Another limitation of the data: the assessors were grouped by rank and military or civilian status. Although they were given differing protocol, no differentiation was made between the Admissions Board and the CRC when analyzing the data. CRC and Admissions Board members are interspersed among the three groups. Further research may examine each body independently to see if the outcome is varied. The researcher does not believe there is reason for concern; that combining the two bodies compromised the integrity of the research.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **A. CONCLUSIONS**

#### **1. Bottom Line**

The Naval Academy makes a considerable effort to evaluate the moral character of its applicants. How? It does this by committee (Admissions Board and CRC) and relies on the personal focus of each of the eighteen members. Indeed, there are as many answers to how the Naval Academy assesses an applicant's moral character as there are members of the Board. As an applicant's package is briefed, each member brings their own perspective, preferences and values to bear on the weight and focus afforded various pieces of "moral" information within the application package. Then, having each set in his or her mind a preliminary determination with regard to an applicant's moral identity, they begin listening to each other. Consensus is reached and a determination rendered.

Consensus is reached through one vote which encompasses an applicant's academic, medical, physical and moral qualifications. The acumen of a member's vote to qualify, many times is based on the applicant's academic and physical standing. For the majority of applicants who are absent any morally adverse marks, it is presumed they possess sound moral identity.

#### **2. The Admission Board's Definition of Moral Identity**

By describing what qualities they look for in a candidate, the Admissions Board and CRC defines moral identity. A candidate who possesses sound moral identity is one who is: foremost truthful, focused on others, learns from moral failure, understands commitment and responsibility, is intrinsically motivated, has had some unique life experience, is sincere, and respects authority. In light of the literature review, I believe these fit very nicely with the type of character the Naval Academy is seeking to attract and admit.

Within the application package presented to the Admissions Board, there are resources to draw from in attempt to identify sound moral identity. Many of the indicators are latent as discussed, but are nonetheless present. Below are some recommendations to help the indicators become more manifest within the application package.

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. For the Admissions Board**

The Admissions Board is designed as a twelve member body with the intent of generating and considering multiple perspectives of an applicant's record. While continuing to cultivate this dynamic, there are a number of administrative and procedural changes the admissions board may want to consider.

First, during the admission board member's indoctrination time, it may prove helpful to include instruction on the various approaches for identifying the indicators of strong moral identity within an applicant's package. This coaching could take the explicit approach. The intent would not be to provide a cookie cutter of how to make determinations, but rather to get new members consciously thinking about and giving priority to an applicant's moral identity.

Second, consider coaching the BGOs on application of the critical incident technique and how to themselves, interview the applicant for moral character. Many times the BGO is the only Naval Academy representative who will speak with an applicant. Knowing that the physical, academic and medical aspects of the candidate will be well documented, their focus could be solely on the applicant's moral identity and strength of character. Currently, length and quality interviews vary significantly with each BGO. Recommend equipping the BGO with skills to further tease out an applicant's moral identity such as asking questions which cause the applicant to reflect on past actions in order to answer.

Third, in an effort to help the Board assimilate some of the subjective data found within the packages, it may be useful to provide the experience of the BGO to the admissions board when presenting their interview debrief comments. During the briefing of an applicant's package the BGO comments are often voiced. Some BGOs have years of experience and have interviewed hundreds of applicants for the Naval Academy. Many are fairly new to the role and uncertain how to rank the applicants. Providing the BGO's experience could assist the board in weighting the input appropriately.

Fourth, a letter of recommendation could be required of two peers. Some old proverbs state that, "Bad company corrupts good morals" and, "Even a youth is known by the company he keeps." Many candidates are known best by their friends. Friends,

family and close acquaintance could provide valuable insight into an applicant's character that in all likelihood would not be understood or addressed by the applicant, his teachers, counselors or the BGO. Use of 360 feedback may prove extremely valuable.

Fifth, as part of the indoctrination process, new Admission Board members and examiners may be required to observe the CRC for half an hour while it is session. Those admissions board member's who do not serve on the CRC do not fully understanding of what the CRC does to make a recommendation to the admission board. Without this understanding, their may be some duplication of effort as there is a reluctance to take CRC recommendations at face value.

## **2. For the Administration**

As illustrated in the literature review, it's clear that the Naval Academy as an institution has received within its founding charter the requirement to possess moral character. By and large I believe the institution is meeting that charter, but more can always be done. Provided are four recommendations for the administration regarding the admissions process.

First, consider reviewing the Naval Academy's Strategic Plan. The admissions process could be an integral part of the Strategic Plan but currently is not addressed.

Second, it may be helpful to further tailor the NASS evaluations to better meet the needs of the Admissions Board. This could be an even more valuable tool helping the admissions board to discern an applicant's moral character. Aside from the BGO interview, this is probably the only opportunity the Naval Academy has to get face time with an applicant.

Third, I recommend establishing a cursory screening process for Admissions Board and CRC members. This would accomplish two objectives 1) it would ensure the morals and priorities of these members reflect the espoused values of the Naval Academy and 2) it will give members a stronger sense of confidence and belonging as they voice their perspectives in the execution of their responsibilities (it will counter the self-minimizing referenced in theme #13).

## **C. FUTURE RESEARCH & NEXT STEPS**

### **1. Future Research**

During this research assignment, several other potential research projects arose. The first involves researching potential correlation between applicant packages and conduct or honor violations. The research would answer the question, are there items in an application package that could be strong indicators of a propensity for moral failure at the Naval Academy? A longitudinal study of this could include officer performance in the fleet. This research would examine commonalities within the application packages of “morally wayward” midshipmen or officers.

The second idea involves research into the performance of midshipmen who were home schooled. The number of home schooling families is on the rise in American. The hypothesis is that those who are taught at home by their parents would have stronger moral identity than their peers who attend school. Research would involve a comparison of home schoolers’ performance with that of their peers. This research could potentially have many applications for the Admissions Board.

The third idea examines potential contributions of the Naval Academy Summer Seminar (NASS) program and how it may be improved to aid the admissions board in making determinations regarding applicants. Each summer, this is a prime opportunity for the Admissions Board to gain insight into attitudes and character of many of the applicants.

The fourth idea involves examining the any relationship between conduct/honor offenses committed by midshipmen while at the Naval Academy and their academic quality point rating (AQPR). This would relate some of Kohlberg’s work which attempted to draw correlations between cognitive aptitude and the ability to morally reason.

### **2. Next Steps**

The next step for this research will be to conduct an Inter-Rater Reliability (IRR) Test<sup>56</sup> of the codebook to measure the consistency with which the results occur. Using the codebook, a second researcher will code the data independently and compare the

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<sup>56</sup> Triola, M. F. (1997), *Elementary Statistics, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed.* New York: Addison-Wesley

results. The goal is 80% agreement on presence. The intent of the IRR test is to prepare the research for publishing.

#### **D. POST SCRIPT: RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE TO CONSIDER**

Kohlberg's Postconventional Level encompasses stage 5 and 6 and is generally not observed in individuals until after their mid twenties. Stage 5 is the recognition or realization that morality supercedes man-made law. It acknowledges the law's responsibility to protect the rights of individuals but understands that the laws themselves are based on moral principles. Through his longitudinal research, Kohlberg believed that only a minority of adults will ever reach the postconventional level of understanding.<sup>57</sup> The Naval Academy is seeking to develop officers who reach the postconventional level of understanding.

Ideally, the Naval Academy is seeking applicants who are already on their way to understanding that morality supercedes man-made law. It has been said that "you cannot legislate morality" yet we do legislate and define morality all the time. As leaders, we should legislate it, and when we do, it works. As a nation we have laws against stealing, and murder. This being said, there are laws against drunk drivers, but not against drunks. We are selective, distinguishing between a sin and a crime. We have laws against perjury, but not against other forms of lying. Again, we are selective, but we are not legislating morality because such legislation does not determine morality. Legislation simply makes a civil law out of an intrinsic moral law that we all know and recognize. I am speaking in legal terms, not religious terms.

One of the Navy truisms is that "a taut ship is a happy ship." A taut ship does not mean an over-trained, workaholic ship, nor does it mean a "chicken" ship. It simply means a ship with laws, the infractions of which are quickly and justly punished. There are two hierarchies of laws. First, there is the Constitution of the United States which is interpreted by Federal Courts. Then there are the laws of the United States, and the respective states and cities. Included in these, with respect to the military, are the UCMJ, Navy Regulations, and finally the laws and regulations of any single unit, ship, squadron, or station.

Within this hierarchy of governments there are always two types of laws.

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<sup>57</sup> Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: the nature and validity of moral stages* (p.xxvii). San Francisco: Harper & Row

1. Malum in se – this refers to behavior which is evil in itself.
2. Malumprohibitum – this refers to something which is “evil” simply because it was prohibited.<sup>58</sup>

An example of malum in se is murder. Every state has established laws against murder but making murder illegal is not what makes murder evil. Because murder was evil the law was made. An example of malumprohibitum is the posted speed limit along roadways. Exceeding 55 mph speed limit is not intrinsically evil; it is only illegal or wrong because the law declares it so. In my home, there are also had two kinds of rules for our children – God’s rules and house rules. Stealing is a violation of God’s rules while jumping on beds is a violation of house rules.

Given these two types of laws, the Naval Academy administration should define moral character as it applies within three arenas:

1. Law, regulations or rules are concerning with both malum in se and malum prohibitum.
2. Character development or moral reasoning deals with malum in se.
3. Morale is concerned with malum prohibitum.

Perhaps the reason wording from Title 10’s *Requirement of Exemplary Conduct* is again percolating in the halls of the Pentagon is because it is no longer enough to declare that an officer should have “good character.”

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<sup>58</sup> Wilson, James. (2004) *Morality, A Military Necessity*. CCM Books, Moscow, ID

## APPENDIX A. ADMISSIONS BOARD PROTOCOL

It is my understanding that you, as a member of the admissions board, are chartered to, “recommend, to the Dean of Admissions, candidates who possess the attributes necessary to successfully graduate from the Naval Academy and earn a commission in the Naval Service.” Part of this admissions review process would include, I assume, selecting candidates who possess sound moral self-identity.

As an admissions board member reviewing applicants’ packages, then, I’d like you to think of a particular review you did where you felt very effective in being able to know with high confidence that this individual should be admitted to the Naval Academy. Pick a case where the particular candidate fit your definition of sound moral self-identity and talk me through every detail of what happened chronologically in making **your** final determination to recommend that he/she should be admitted. Please do not analyze yourself as you go, just tell me what happened. Describe it to me as someone who has never been involved with the process and is actually hearing this as a “selection” story. It’s like telling me about the candidate being chosen as if you were narrating the storyline of a movie.

\* Task taken from Superintendent’s Admissions Guidance for the Class of 2009  
dtd 29 Sept 04

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## **APPENDIX B. CHARACTER REVIEW COMMITTEE PROTOCOL**

Primary Question: It is my understanding that you, as a member of the Character Review Committee (CRC), are chartered to, “review background information relating to the character of identified candidates and make recommendations to the Admissions Board.” I understand the cases that are referred to the CRC contain an incident which calls the candidate’s moral character into question. Your review results in one of three recommendations:

1. Disqualify the package
2. Down RAB
3. Let compete without down RAB

I’d like you to reflect on your experience with the CRC and think of a particular package where your initial inclination was to disqualify but the CRC discussion persuaded you to let compete. Talk me chronologically through every detail of the considerations you addressed in making **your** final determination to recommend that he/she should be allowed to compete. Please do not analyze yourself as you go, just tell me what happened. Describe it to me as someone who has never been involved with the process and is actually hearing this as a “selection” story. It’s like telling me about the candidate being chosen as if you were narrating the storyline of a movie.

\* Task taken from the Dean of Admissions Supplemental Guidance for the Class of 2009.

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## **APPENDIX C. SUPERINTENDENT'S PROTOCOL**

1. What considerations cause the Superintendent to shape/change his guidance to the Admissions Board annually?
2. How does the Superintendent weigh physical, mental, and moral aspects of an applicant's package?
3. What are the most important character qualities the Superintendent wants to see in a candidate?
4. How much does the Superintendent believe a midshipman's character or morals can be developed while at USNA?
5. Are there thresholds of moral character below which even the Naval Academy moral development programs and experience can't build upon and raise to the desired standard?

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