Homeschooling as an Act of Conscientious Objection

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> Wherever we go, at first we are looked upon as some special, suspicious kind of beings but in due time when people know us we are generally respected and in some cases admired. We are certainly bearing testimony to our beliefs and we hope seed will fall upon good ground and bring forth fruit in other lives…

The statement above was made by a deviant, someone who acted in a divergent way from normative behavior. But what, exactly, was the deviancy? Was it deviancy of lifestyle of some sort? Of eating habits? Of boycotting shopping at Wal-Mart? Of how one raised her children? Of abstention from military service? Of refusal to be vaccinated? In truth, the deviancy spoken about in the above was conscientious objection to World War I (W. H. Eaton as quoted in Schinkel, 2007, p. 538), but it could easily have been about any of those other forms of breaking from the norms as well. Deviancy comes in many packages, of which conscientious objection is one.

Typically, the term conscientious objection is used to describe an individual's objection to being conscripted into the military (Cohen, 1968; Harries-Jenkins, 1993; Schinkel, 2007), but the term has also been used in different ways. For example, one of the first documented uses in the United States was in regards to people who refused compulsory vaccinations (Moskos & Chambers, 1993; Schinkel, 2007). Other uses present in scholarly literature are in reference to parents sending their children to private Christian schools (conscientiously objecting to the secular humanism they perceive in public schools) (Rice, 1978);

consumers boycotting shopping at Wal-Mart, which they perceive to be engaging in harmful and illegitimate business practices (Cronin, Reysen, & Branscombe, 2012); Sir Thomas More's conscientious/religion-based opposition to approving King Henry VIII as the head of the church in England (Schinkel, 2007); and pharmacists or doctors refusing to provide certain services and products (e.g., birth control, abortions) to patients because doing so violated the health-care practitioner's ethical/religious convictions (Alegre, 2009).

The term "conscientious objection" in and of itself provides a rationale and motivation for the act of deviancy—that one is compelled to be true to his/her ethical beliefs (one's conscience) even if those beliefs run counter to society's laws and/or normative understandings and practices. Although some definitions of conscientious objection specify or imply that conscientious objection must entail a refusal to comply with legal obligations (thus setting the action in the legal/public sphere), other definitions do not (e.g., the Wal-Mart and Christian school examples). Schinkel (2007), for example, argues that while there is a distinction between conscientious objection as "a private phenomenon and conscientious objection as a political-juridical phenomenon," this difference is immaterial as it is the combination of motivations, actions, and subsequent consequences that define something as conscientious objection or someone as a conscientious objector. Thus, authors such as Rice, Alegre, and Cronin, Reysen, and Branscombe (cited above) are in line with Schinkel in their usages of the term "conscientious objection" for their studies.

One begins to wonder, then, if there are any other deviant behaviors that can also be identified as conscientious objection. Olson (2009) posits that other, non-normative educational choices made by parents for their children (e.g., homeschooling) can be considered conscientious objection (pp. 151-152). This connection, in fact, is built into the statutes related to compulsory attendance (and thus by extension to homeschooling) in the state of Virginia. According to Virginia Code §22.1-254,

> A school board shall excuse from attendance at school … Any pupil who, together with his parents, by reason of bona fide religious training or belief is conscientiously opposed to attendance at school.

Is the decision to homeschool, in all cases, truly a manifestation of a conscientious (moral/ethical) objection? The focus of this article is to stake out the qualified position that yes, in almost all cases, homeschooling is a conscientious objection. Notwithstanding the discussion of the multitude of conscientious objector definitions above, when fleshing out the argument that homeschooling is an act of conscientious objection

to conventional public education, the definition of conscientious objectors as purely connected to military conscription will be used. As this definition is the one most typically used in common parlance, one can thus reason that if parallels can be drawn between this definition and another behavior, then that second behavior can also be categorized as conscientious objection. This article will develop the thesis by explicating first the numerous parallels, and then detailing the few (albeit significant) points of departure between military conscientious objection and homeschooling. The article will end with a delineation of the possible ramifications of this comparison as well as jumping-off points for future research related to this issue.

The Parallels

Similar Motivations

Those who engage in conscientious objection to military service and conscientious objection to sending their children to public schools have a broad range of motivations for doing so, and this broad range runs along parallel tracks for each. There is a religious/secular track as well as a personal exemption/social change track.

Religious/secular motivations among conscientious objectors to military service. Studies of conscientious objectors to military service break down participants into two main categories—those motivated by religious reasons and those motivated by secular reasons (Harries-Jenkins, 1993; Moskos & Chambers, 1993).

Many of the first officially recognized conscientious objectors to military conscription came from the early "peace churches" (Quaker, Mennonite, Brethren). In these churches' doctrines, there were specific injunctions against members taking part in military actions. Much of the history of conscientious objection to military service in the United States, from the early 1800s to the early 1900s, shows that it was only such "peace church" members who, legally, could be officially approved as conscientious objectors (Macgill, 1968; Moskos & Chambers, 1993). During World War I, this was expanded somewhat to include members of other officially recognized religious denominations (Chambers, 1993).

In the 20th century, as pressures from non-overtly-religious conscientious objectors rose, the United States Supreme Court opened the gates a bit to officially identify more secular individuals as conscientious objectors. For example, in the case of *United States v. Seeger* (1965), "the Court held that a recognized CO no longer had to show belief in a god or supreme being, but instead only had to demonstrate 'sincere or meaningful belief' that occupied a place 'parallel to that filled by God'"

(Chambers, 1993, p. 42). Five years later, in *Welsh v. United States*, "the Court went even further and declared that even strongly held atheistic beliefs against war would meet the test of CO status as long as they were 'ethical and moral beliefs'" (Chambers, 1993, p. 42). These secular conscientious objectors were not following a particular religious doctrine in their opposition to their involvement in military; rather, they were following the dictates of their personal consciences.

Religious/secular motivations among homeschoolers. Just as has been done in the case of conscientious objectors to military service, studies of homeschoolers have broken down these families into two primary groups—religious and secular. First are the ideologues or "believers"—parents opposed to the content of public school curriculum and who wish to have more religious (typically Christian) content in schools (Murphy, 2012; Stevens, 2001; Van Galen & Pitman, 1991). Many of these ideologues/believers feel that parents are commanded by God (or some higher power) to keep their children at home and teach them the centrality of the families' religious values and beliefs (Murphy, 2012).

Then there are the pedagogues or "inclusives" (Stevens, 2001; Van Galen & Pitman, 1991)—parents who believe the structure of public education is pedagogically unsound and who wish to "nurture children's innate goodness and intelligence" through pedagogically progressive practices (including child-centeredness, interdisciplinary examination of phenomenon, minimal hierarchy and overt structure) and develop in them "a strong sense of self and the confidence that they can accomplish whatever they want in this world" (Kapitulik, 2011, p. 78-79). The "inclusives" would also include those parents who believe that their children are not being well-served by the existing curriculum and social structures of the school (e.g. parents of children with academic gifts or with learning disabilities, parents of children of color, etc.) (Collom, 2005; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012; Mazama & Lundy, 2012).

These groupings are not theoretically "pure" or mutually exclusive. Some believers/ideologues share (to a lesser degree) the pedagogues'/inclusives' concerns about public school pedagogical practices. And some pedagogues/inclusives share the believers'/ideologues' concerns about the values and norms emphasized in public schools (e.g., competition, etc.). Much of the research on motivations to homeschool seems to indicate that both believer and inclusive parents are making the decision to homeschool because doing so, in part, follows the dictates of their consciences. While other ends might also be served, the instigating factor almost always seems to be connected to a feeling of being drawn to the decision through the actor's sense of what is good and right.

The fact that homeschooling shares with conscientious objection to military service this track of motivations that run from religious to secular and that both motivations stem from personal conscience form one piece of the justification for extending the definition of conscientious objection to include a family's educational choices. Another parallel set of motivations has to do with the beneficiaries of the conscientious objection action, detailed below.

Personal exemption/social change motivations. In the case of homeschooling, both the pedagogues/inclusives and believers/ideologues are trying to avoid having their children suffer from and being complicit in the perpetuation of a certain environment which they feel violates their moral/ethical/pedagogical beliefs. In the case of conscientious objection to military service, the religious and secular objectors are also trying to avoid being complicit in (and, secondarily, suffering from) a certain environment and certain actions which they see as immoral. In a sense, then, all of these folks are seeking a personal exemption from the normative practice (either for themselves or their children). Is that all, though? Are these people all just "in it for themselves?" Or is there something bigger taking place—a critique of existing policies so as to instigate social change for the benefit of all?

There is little doubt that both homeschoolers and conscientious objectors to military service are all (at least implicitly) critiquing existing governmental policies (of mandatory conscription or compulsory school attendance) (Allen, 2010; Gaither, 2009; Kapitulik, 2011; Murphy, 2012; Schinkel, 2007). Do/did they all also seek to bring about greater changes in the overall system (e.g., abolish the draft and abolish compulsory school attendance)? There are those for whom this is the case, but others for whom it is not. Thus, I will deal with this section in two places—once here and again later in the points of departure section.

In the case of conscientious objectors to military service, the answer seems to be that conscientious objectors not only sought CO status for themselves so as to avoid the ethical dilemma of acting contrary to their beliefs, but also sought the end of wars as a means of resolving disputes. The research reviewed suggests that these individuals saw themselves as discrete actors in a greater social movement aimed at overall peace (Cohen & Greenspan, 1968; Houghton, 1973; Roseman, 1969). There is no doubt that there were likely individuals who were only thinking about themselves in their decision to declare conscientious objection, but their viewpoints have not been particularly well documented, and thus one could assume that they are in the minority.

In the case of homeschooling, the answer to the question of whether

participants are seeking to bring about change in society is a bit mixed. There are those homeschoolers who identify themselves as being part of a distinct social movement aimed at improving education for all children (Bauman, 2002; Hill, 2000). There are also those homeschoolers who will not necessarily say their homeschooling actions will improve other children's education, but that they will improve society in general (Bobel, 2002; McDowell, 2000; Farris & Woodruff, 2000; Ray, 2000; Smith & Sikkink, 1999). For example, Stambach and David (2005) cited one homeschooling parent who said that "as each child is positively influenced, society can only benefit from the improvements" (p. 1649). There are also those who say that their families' individualized benefits are largely all that drives their decision to homeschool. For example, there are homeschoolers who openly view homeschooling as an "escape" or "what is best" for their children (Kapitulik, 2011; McDowell, 2000; Schenwar, 2012). Such choice of language implies a lack of interest in overall societal change, a lack of interest illustrated well in Kapitulik's interviews with homeschooling parents. He wrote about a homeschooling mother named Donna who "did not become a homeschooler because she was drawn to the goals and aims of the movement. Rather, she started doing what she felt was best for her children" (Kapitulik, 2011, p. 111-112). She was representative of his sample and he argues that

> none of the parents I spoke with was intent on changing schools for the betterment of other children…. homeschoolers are not interested in reforming the rules of any game to make them more fair or effective. Rather, they want to do what is best for themselves and their own families. Most homeschoolers recognize that they share this individualistic orientation. (Kapitulik, 2011, p. 137)

While this attitude might seem rather off-putting by its self-interestedness, there are homeschooling researchers and thinkers who argue that this self-interest actually will ultimately lead to positive social change (Bobel, 2002; McDowell, 2000; Farris & Woodruff, 2000; Ray, 2000; Smith & Sikkink, 1999). In a way, they are positing a free-market/invisible hand argument in which the individuals' efforts to maximize their own gains results in benefits to society, even if the individuals began only with self-interest, and no altruism, in mind (O'Sullivan & Sheffrin, 2003). This paradoxical relationship between self-interest and social benefits will be revisited in the ramifications section of the article.

As can be seen from the above discussion, in the case both of conscientious objectors to military service and homeschoolers, there are parallels in terms of the motivations/end goals sought. In all cases, the participants (in either military conscientious objection or homeschool-

ing) are seeking exemption from some required behavior that violates their consciences (thus receiving direct benefits from their actions). And in some (though not all) cases, the participants (in either military conscientious objection or homeschooling) are also taking action so as to change the overall system and thus directly benefit others.

This similar set of end goal motivations coupled with the instigating motives of secular or religious reasons for acting, provide an initial piece to the justification for why homeschooling can be considered an act of conscientious objection.

Similar Historical Trajectories

A second category of parallels between conscientious objection to military service and homeschooling involves how the two have similar historical trajectories. In both cases, there are roughly three stages to their histories:

1. Intense hostility and precarious legal recourse; accommodations minimal;

2. Continued suspicion and skepticism, but an opening up and acceptance of more alternatives;

3. Mainstream acceptance/legitimation.

Stage one. In the initial emergences of both conscientious objection to military service and homeschooling, the practices were met with intense hostility and precarious legal recourse. In the case of conscientious objection to military service, the early stages were marked by few legal options, as well as minimal accommodations offered. People who refused to take part in required military actions were threatened with legal action or fined. After some resistance, local and federal governments worked out accommodations with the "peace churches" who were allowed exemption from military service due to the public respecting their religions' "cardinal tenet[s] that the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and the Bible prohibited them from participating in war or engaging in any violence against other human beings" (Chambers, 1993, p. 25). These accommodations included the objector paying a fine or hiring someone as a substitute (Chambers, 1993).

In the case of homeschooling, in the late 1970s, when people in large numbers were first seeking to pull their children out of institutional schools (be they public or private), they were met with significant legal constraints. During these years, home education was treated as a crime in almost every state (that is not to say that there were a lot of prosecutions; rather, that the laws were written in such a way that

parents who did not send their children to a school of some sort were technically guilty of encouraging criminal truancy) (Somerville, n.d.; Stevens, 2001). Enforcement of these laws was erratic, thus in a sense there were some accommodations offered by those in power; however, the practice of homeschooling was limited to some degree because of these legal barriers.

Stage two. In the second stage of the trajectories of both homeschooling and conscientious objection to military service, the practitioners were met with continued suspicion and skepticism, but there was also an opening up and acceptance of more alternatives. In the case of conscientious objection to military service, in this second stage, while there was still widespread public rejection of objectors (e.g., in WWI, women sometimes gave white feathers to non-combatant young men as a symbol of criticism for perceived cowardice), the exemptions for conscientious objection expanded beyond the historic "peace churches" into more religious denominations. Accommodations were also expanded to include non-combatant roles in the military and alternative civilian service (Chambers, 1993).

In the case of homeschooling, the middle stage was much the same as it was for conscientious objection to military service. Gradually-increasing activism on the part of many parents (especially religious parents) who wished to homeschool led to the development of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), which in turn spearheaded a number of legal challenges to the compulsory attendance laws in various states. Legal barriers to homeschooling began to disintegrate under these pressures (Somerville, n.d.), and thus families could more easily experiment with homeschooling options, but, at the same time, they were still faced with criticisms from "school officials and wary relatives" (Stevens, 2003).

Stage 3. In the last stage of the historical trajectories (where we are presently with both groups), the conscientious objectors to military service or homeschoolers are more widely accepted and their actions legitimated. In the case of conscientious objection to military service, this final stage has also consisted of a broadening base of eligibility for exemption (as detailed by the Supreme Court cases discussed earlier), as well as wider popular acceptance of the practice. In the case of homeschooling, the practice "enjoys legal protection, popular acceptance and increasing amounts of institutional support" (Stevens, 2003, p. 90).

Connections between the stages and U.S. culture. Moskos and Chambers (1993) coined the term "secularization of conscience" for the historical trajectory of military conscientious objection. And Stevens

(2003) has termed the process "normalization" for the homeschoolers. Both authors, as well as others, have pointed out that these processes are manifestations of socio-political and socio-cultural aspects and changes in American society. For example, the United States has traditions of "individual liberty and religious freedom" and suspicions of too much government control over individual actions which make the country a ripe breeding ground for ultimate acceptance of dissenting/deviant viewpoints (Moskos & Chambers, 1993, p. 11; Ray, 2000). Authors further argue that the acceptance of both conscientious objection to military service and homeschooling have become more mainstream due, in part, to modernization and the heightened valuation of the individual (characterized by "self-centered privatization, the 'me generation,' and the impact of materialism and satisfaction of individual wants" that have been greatly promoted through mass media and consumer culture) (Moskos & Chambers, p. 199-201; Murphy, 2012; Stevens, 2003; Apple, 2000). Other authors have also noted that even as religious beliefs have waned, the United States culture still seems to respect and recognize conscience-related ethical quandaries (Noone, 1993).

This similar set of trajectories coupled with similar causal factors provides a second piece to the justification for why homeschooling can be considered an act of conscientious objection.

Similar Taxonomies/Typologies of Actors and Actions

A third category of parallels between homeschoolers and conscientious objectors to military service is that in both there are similar taxonomies of actors and gradations of actions, which range from the absolutist to the more accommodationist.

In the case of conscientious objection to military service, there are different ways of distinguishing types of actors. They can be distinguished on the basis of their motives (discussed in an earlier section), on the basis of the scope of their beliefs, and on the basis of the person's "degree of willingness to cooperate with the state, specifically represented by the military or the government's conscription agency" (Moskos & Chambers, 1993, p. 5). The same such bases distinguish types of homeschoolers. A chart such as that found in Figure 1 might help to illustrate the parallels.

Scope of beliefs. Not all conscientious objectors are the same, nor are all homeschoolers the same. As illustrated by Figure 1 (see next page), both homeschoolers and conscientious objectors to military service share a gradation in the scope of their beliefs toward war or institutional schools.

Figure 1

Basis of organization	***Conscientious objectors to military service***	***Homeschoolers***
Scope of beliefs	Universalistic—opposed to all wars	"1st choicers" and radical/anarchist unschoolers—opposed to all institutionalized schools
	Selective—opposed to a particular conflict	"2nd choicers"—not opposed to all schools, but homeschool when acceptable schools not available
	Discretionary—reject the use of particular weapons (e.g., nuclear)	Homeschoolers who pull their children out of school for part of the day or for certain grades only
Degree of willingness to cooperate with state/level of confrontation with power	Military conscientious objector/ low level of confrontation—active duty military who have trouble following certain orders/actions	In service or certified teachers who advocate the merits of homeschooling or who recognize and are vocal about the shortcomings of conventional education
	Non-combatant CO/ low to mid level of confrontation—Will go into military, but won't bear arms	Homeschoolers who will take part in some academic and extra curricular aspects of institutional schooling (e.g., community college courses for advanced content, or will mimic institutionalized schooling practices at home)
		Will register as homeschoolers with the state and follow the legal regulations.
	Alternativist CO/mid level of confrontation—will "agree to participate in civilian alternative service in lieu of military service	Homeschoolers who will take part in some extracurricular aspects of institutionalized schooling (e.g., sports, drama art), but minimal involvement with the more academic side of schooling
		Will not mimic much of schooling practices or pedagogy
		Will register as homeschoolers with the state and will try to follow rules, but won't be strictly bound
	Absolutist CO/high level of confrontation—will not cooperate with conscription system (e.g., refuse to register for the draft, might burn draft cards, and will likely decline any alternative service.	Radical unschoolers or extreme fundamentalists who won't legally register and resist all government oversight.

Universalistic / 1st choicers. In the case of conscientious objectors to military service, the group with the widest scope of beliefs is the "universalistic" objectors. These individuals are opposed to all wars, regardless of location, enemy, weapons used, and rationale for involvement. These are the textbook pacifists who regard war as wrong in every instance (Moskos & Chambers, 1993). This group's parallel in the homeschooling realm are the "1st choicers"—the families who are opposed (for religious or more secular reasons) to all schools in general. For these families, homeschooling is the preferred educational choice, and the families never really seriously considered enrolling their children in institutionalized school (Lois, 2012). Radical/anarchist unschoolers who regard all forms of institutionalized education as illegitimate/unconscionable fall into this category as well (Haworth & Antliff, 2012; Martin, 2009).

Selective / "2nd choicers." In the case of conscientious objectors to military service, the group with the next step down in terms of scope of beliefs is the "selective" objectors. These individuals are not purist pacifists, but they might oppose a particular conflict if they view it as illegitimate (e.g., not "just" according to the just war theory/doctrine) or immoral on some other level (the Vietnam War is an example of a war that many people found unjust and thus refused to participate in even though they may have been willing to take part in another war) (Moskos & Chambers, 1993). The selective conscientious objectors to military service have a parallel in the homeschooling realm, and these are the "2nd choicers." Second choicers make the choice to homeschool when they can find no other acceptable alternative to the schools available in their area (Lois, 2012). These families are not opposed to all schools, only the schools that are available to them at a given moment. In many cases, for these families, the schools to which they would prefer to send their children are not geographically or financially accessible (e.g. the community does not offer any private schools that the families would agree with, or the cost of an acceptable private school is prohibitive).

Discretionary. In the case of both conscientious objectors to military service and homeschooling, there is a group which is considered "discretionary." The discretionary military objectors are those who reject the use of particular weapons in a conflict and thus will refuse to participate if those weapons might be used (Moskos & Chambers, 1993). They are not pure pacifists and are not opposed to the use of force in conflicts, they simply draw the line at the use of certain weaponry. The discretionary homeschoolers are similar in that they only reject certain aspects of institutionalized schools. They may oppose certain practices in the schools (e.g., standardized testing, rigid academic curricula at what they see as

too early an age, the teaching of certain content, etc.) and thus they will pull their children out of school for part of the day or for certain grades only (Murphy, 2012).

Degree of willingness to cooperate with state/level of confrontation with power. Not only do homeschoolers and conscientious objectors to military service share a parallel gradation in the scope of their beliefs, they also share a parallel set of gradations in their degree of willingness to cooperate with the state. Some conscientious objectors to military service and institutionalized schooling are more willing to be confrontational with power than others.

Low level of confrontation. There are military conscientious objectors who are only willing to engage in a low level of confrontation with the government. To some degree, then, these individuals are willing to cooperate with the state in military actions. These include active duty military who have trouble following certain orders/actions (Harries-Jenkins, 1993; Schinkel, 2007). An example of such individuals might be soldiers who refuse to follow orders to kill civilians (e.g.. in the My Lai massacre in the Vietnam War). There are also homeschoolers who only put forth a low level of confrontation with power. For example, there is a growing group of families who engage in homeschooling, but do so using the vehicle of virtual public schools (e.g., the Virginia Virtual Academy is a K-12 company online school; parents enroll their children in this virtual school, but are also the at-home teachers of the child—is a hybrid homeschooling/schooling scenario). These low-level confronters would also include in-service or certified teachers who advocate the merits of homeschooling (Morrison, in press) or who recognize and are vocal about the shortcomings of conventional education (Santoro, 2011).

Mid level of confrontation. The next step in the gradation are those conscientious objectors to military service and institutional schooling who are willing to engage in a medium level of confrontation. For example, there are individuals who are willing to be drafted into the military, but confront authority by saying that they are unwilling to bear arms. They serve out their time in the military, but specify that they would only do such things as serve in the medical corps or provide administrative support of some kind (Moskos & Chambers, 1993). There are other military mid-level confronters who are a bit more confrontational—Moskos and Chambers (1993) term them "alternativists." These are individuals who "agree to participate in civilian alternative service in lieu of military service" (p. 5). For example, during World War II, there were camps set up for these "alternativists." On the homeschooling side are those

homeschoolers who will take part in some academic and extra-curricular aspects of institutional schooling (e.g., community college courses for advanced content, or will mimic institutionalized schooling practices at home) (Kapitulik, 2011; Murphy, 2012). These families will follow government mandates about registration as homeschoolers as well as other legal regulations set forth for them. These families are thus willing to engage with institutionalized schooling, but are vocal and up-front with authorities about where they draw the line on involvement. Among homeschoolers, there are also other mid-level confronters who are a bit more confrontational than this. These are homeschoolers who clearly draw the line between academics and non-academics. They are willing to take part in some extracurricular aspects of institutionalized schooling (e.g., sports, drama, art), but refuse to be involved with the more academic side of schooling (Murphy, 2012). These families also will not mimic much of institutional schooling practices or pedagogy in their homes. And although they will register as homeschoolers with the state and will try to follow rules, they refuse to be strictly bound.

High level of confrontation. In the realm of conscientious objectors to military service, there are the "absolutists" who "refuse to cooperate with the authorities in any way in regard to the conscription system" (Moskos & Chambers, 1993, p. 5). These individuals argue that the state has no authority over them, and thus they will refuse to register for the draft or they might burn draft cards, and they will likely decline any alternative service should it be offered to them. The parallel group of homeschoolers to these high-level confronters include those who won't legally register their children as homeschoolers, and who resist all government oversight or regulations. Their argument, like the "absolutists," is that the state has no authority over them and their families. Homeschoolers who fall into this category often either follow the most unstructured form of homeschooling, known as radical or anarchist unschooling (Haworth & Antliff, 2012; Kapitulik, 2011; Martin, 2009) or are members of extreme fundamentalist religious groups (McMullen, 2002).

Further connections between taxonomy and definitions of conscientious objection. According to Schinkel (2007), a willingness to suffer consequences as well as a willingness to offer public reasoning for one's actions are both necessary aspects for an objection to be considered conscientious. One must be willing to suffer consequences as proof that a higher reasoning is at work (e.g., that ethical values are being threatened). And one must be willing to justify his/her actions "in terms of reasons that others can understand (to a certain extent at least)—which implies that the conscientious decision is well-considered and carefully

thought through" (Schinkel, 2007, p. 519-520). As one can see in Figure 1, the comparative taxonomy created implicitly includes gradations of potential consequences that the actor might suffer as well as gradations of public reasoning the actor is willing to offer to the general public. For example, while all actors on the taxonomy might suffer consequences for their actions (economic, social, or political), the absolutist conscientious objector to military service and the most radical homeschoolers have the potential to suffer extreme economic sanctions and/or imprisonment. And while all actors on the taxonomy provide public reasonings for their actions, the absolutists and most radical homeschoolers are the ones called upon to explain their actions in significantly more depth. This third parallel of similar taxonomies continues the thesis that homeschooling is act of conscientious objection.

Similar Characteristics of Actors

The fourth and final category of parallels between homeschoolers and conscientious objectors to military service lies in the area of characteristics of the actors (demographics and other).

Both homeschooling parents and conscientious objectors to military service, at this point in time, have higher levels of education in general than the aggregate non-homeschooling parents and non-COs (Bauman, 2002; Bobel, 2002; Houghton, 1973; Lois, 2012; Kapitulik, 2011; Moskos & Chambers, 1993; Murphy, 2012; Rudner, 1999; Stambach & David, 2005).

In addition to this demographic characteristic, both homeschooling parents and conscientious objectors to military service experience feelings of doubt about their actions. Schinkel (2007) argues that doubt is another necessary piece of conscientious objection. He writes, "Open(ended)ness and doubt, then, do not weaken conscience or the case of a conscientious objector, but are an integral part of it, without which conscientiousness would turn into self-righteousness, and the possibility of self-criticism would be lost" (Schinkel, 2007, p. 512). As mentioned, there is evidence that both homeschoolers and military conscientious objectors have doubts about the legitimacy of their choices and actions and frequently question themselves and their motives (Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, n.d.; Morrison, in press).

This fourth parallel, while minor, gives further support to the thesis that homeschooling is legitimately an act of conscientious objection.

Points of Departure

The key points of departure between conscientious objectors to

military service and homeschooling include gender differences of actors, as well as who actually are the subjects of their actions, differences in degree of dictates of personal conscience, and differences in end goals sought.

Actors and Subjects of Action

In the case of conscientious objection to military service, the actors (i.e., the ones applying for CO status) are also the subjects of the action and are almost always males (with some exceptions, such as Israel). The CO is the one who directly experiences the efforts of the choice to pursue CO status. And while there certainly are females who conscientiously object to military service, historically it is the males who have to take the action on their own behalf and live through the consequences of their application's acceptance or denial.

In the case of homeschooling, while the children can be either male or female, the actor (in terms of applying for state exemption and performing the labor of homeschooling) typically falls to females. And in the case of homeschooling, the actor is the parent(s) (most often the mother) and it is the children, along with the mother, who are the subjects and directly experience the effects of the choice to homeschool.

This difference in gender of actors and subjects of action may well subtract from the overall thesis that homeschooling is an act of conscientious objection similar to objecting to military service. Can it truly be argued that the act of homeschooling is a conscience-driven act when the subjects of the action (the children) potentially have no real choice in the matter? But then again, the parent (most often the mother) in the homeschooling family is both actor and subject of the action, so the conscientious objection definition can still stand, albeit with an addendum that others (the children) experience the benefits and detriments of the action. The gender of the homeschooling parents also comes into play further in this article, in the section on political action.

Different Degrees to Dictates of Personal Conscience

While both military COs and homeschoolers would argue that their actions are a result of deep reflection on what is good and right, there are clearly different degrees to the dictates of their personal consciences. For the military COs (especially those who fall into the universalistic and absolutist categories detailed in the typology), war is foundationally immoral. Perhaps to some radical/anarchist unschoolers, school is foundationally immoral, but this seems to be an extreme minority position. I do not think that most of the homeschoolers whom I have studied and who have been studied by other researchers would use the

language of immorality to apply to schools. Although they may come close and argue that what schools do is not "right" or "good," they do not seem to argue that schools, in and of themselves, are at their very core immoral. While this difference in degree might subtract from the overall argument, there is still enough evidence that ethical beliefs and conscience are being engaged in the decision to homeschool, thus making the homeschooling decision a conscientious one, albeit, perhaps, based on a lesser degree of conscientious objection.

Other Ends Being Served

While conscientious objection to military service seems to serve the dual ends of the CO avoiding complicity in immoral acts and making a public stance in the social movement against war, homeschooling sometimes serves less than these two ends. As discussed earlier, there are homeschooling families who openly admit to making the decision to homeschool primarily to serve themselves and their families' needs and are not in it to further a social movement against schools in general (Kapitulik, 2011). These families are involved in homeschooling to serve their pedagogical or religious beliefs within the microcosm of the family only. As discussed earlier, there is dispute amongst researchers as to whether this individual focus also, implicitly, serves a greater/common good. This common good argument will be taken up further in an upcoming section.

Homeschooling, with some qualified exclusions, can be considered an act of conscientious objection. While there are significant differences between military COs and homeschoolers, as outlined above, the comparison still holds a good deal of merit.

Ramifications of the Comparison

The above sections have outlined the argument for why conscientious objector status can be extended to homeschooling. This whole discussion, though, has begged the question of "Who cares? Why does such a comparison matter?" While there is certainly some value to the intellectual exercise of comparing two seemingly dissimilar concepts, other values also exist, most particularly in terms of helping us broaden our understandings of political acts for the common good.

Conscientious Objection as Safety-Valve?

Comparing homeschooling to conscientious objection to military service might help us to better understand the power of homeschooling to bring about social change, particularly in the area of public education.

One pessimistic view of conscientious objection and social change has to do with the idea of a safety valve.

In the United States, the increase in the number of applicants for conscientious objector status in the military as well as public resistance to war in general "led to the beginning of the AVF: All-Volunteer Armed Force" (Chambers, 1993). Can it thus be argued that individual acts of military conscientious objection added up to a social movement that ultimately ended the draft? Probably not. As of 2013, compulsory Selective Service registration is still in place for all males over the age of 18, even though there is technically no longer a draft. The specter, then, of the draft being re-instituted does linger. Some authors have argued that this resolution, this triumph/no triumph of a movement for social change was inevitable. Cohen (1968) and others (Crawford, 2003; Cohen & Greenspan, 1968; MacGill, 1968; Noone, 1993; Schinkel, 2007) have argued that "the provision of a special category for conscientious objection is a device of the body politic…conscientious objection may be viewed as a legal pressure valve, deliberately devised to relieve the tension between deeply held moral convictions and the demands of the law, when that tension becomes extreme" (Cohen, 1968, p. 269). This safety valve thus ultimately protects and legitimates the power of the state because by applying for CO status, the applicant is essentially "admitting in some measure the propriety of that law or the state's right to enact it" (Cohen, 1968, p. 272). (Granted, absolutists who even refuse to register or apply for conscientious objector status are not doing this.) This provision for a safety valve seems quite rational and instrumental—the government is staving off massive resistance to its requirements by providing an "out" for certain individuals. According to Schinkel (2007), this safety valve idea might be "part of a strategy to render conscientious objection harmless" (p. 535). He further states that "conscientious objection constitutes the exception to the rule and must therefore be considered an affirmation of the rule" (p. 543).

Thus, by linking homeschooling to military conscientious objection, are we dooming the former to the harmlessness of the latter, as argued by the authors above? Again, in the United States, the reinstitution of the draft is still possible and still partly in place (Selective Service registration requirements). And similarly, there are still compulsory attendance laws regarding schooling. Is it possible that all the efforts of both military conscientious objectors and homeschoolers could be for naught were a major "national crisis" to emerge and thus demand a closing of the gates of alternatives to military service and schooling?

Or Are the Gates Forever Open?

As argued in the historical trajectories section of this article, military conscientious objection has been "secularized" (Moskos & Chambers, 1993) and homeschooling has been "normalised" (Stevens, 2003). Does this mean, then, that there is no going backward and that the concept of conscientious objection as a "safety valve" is fundamentally flawed? One could argue that the increase in conscientious objection to the draft in the 1960s and 1970s directly caused the switch to the AVF—in essence that conscientious objectors brought down the draft. Could homeschooling thus similarly "bring down" the system of public education in the United States? Probably not, because it likely is not possible for all families to homeschool due to economic, educational, and other reasons (Bauman, 2002; Hill, 2000; Lubienski, 2000; Murphy, 2002). But as more people have chosen homeschooling, we have seen a new development of hybridization of schooling options between public and home (Bauman, 2002; Hill, 2000; Stevens, 2003). For example, as Bauman (2002) writes,

> public schools in many jurisdictions have already begun to provide services of various types to home schoolers. Laws in at least seven states permit home schooled students to participate in sports, music and other extracurricular activities in regular schools … In Florida and Iowa, schools also allow home schoolers to take individual courses. (p. 2)

In addition, "many private organizations and enterprises have entered the K-12 distance education field with their sights set on home schoolers as a primary audience" (Bauman, 2002, p. 3). Thus, while homeschoolers might not be able to "bring down" public education, it may likely have the power to drastically alter it.

This more positive view of the power of homeschooling to bring about social change identifies conscientious objection as a clear political act. While conscientious objection to military service has often already been depicted as a political act (in service to the social movement for peace), has homeschooling similarly been depicted (and viewed by practitioners) as a political act? Some say yes, some no. We are thus now afforded the opportunity to trouble this notion of what makes something a political act.

What Makes an Act Political?

Is an act overtly political if it resides mainly in the private sphere (such as the home/family relationship)? (Kapitulik, 2011) Or must it be in the public sphere to constitute a political act? If it can be either, is a further defining point that the act (whether done in the private or public sphere) is political only if it serves the public good? This question hinges on how one defines/identifies the common good. To some authors,

the common good is defined as that which brings about equitable opportunities, or benefits the many as opposed to the few; to others, it is defined as that which maximizes individual choice (neoliberalism); and to others it is that which leads to personal fulfillment and minimal personal sacrifice on the part of all citizens.

Authors have offered opposing thoughts on whether homeschooling serves the common good as alternately defined above. Some authors argue that homeschooling does not serve the common good. They find that because it is most often women who perform the labor of homeschooling and sacrifice the most for their children's home education, that women's inequitable traditional roles and essentialism about gender are strengthened and exploited, and thus the common/public good of equity for all is not served (Bobel, 2002; Kapitulik, 2011; Lois, 2012; Schenwar, 2012; Stambach & David, 2005; Stevens, 2001). Schenwar (2002) wrote that "raising radical, revolutionary children isn't feminist if the mom's individuality is getting lost in the lives of her kids."

Other authors continue this argument and discuss how by turning inward to the family and putting energies into homeschooling, these families are failing to work toward changes that will benefit the many (Kapitulik, 2011; Lois, 2012; Lubienski, 2000; Murphy, 2012; Smith, 1998). The benefits to the "many" here are defined as all children getting a high-quality education (an education where children have access to social capital, above-adequate resources, exposure to diversity, and a well-rounded curriculum), all families benefiting from social and economic institutions that are humane and compatible with modern life, and all living in a country with a vibrant, shared culture. One commenter on an online homeschooling article wrote

> if all...families were to take their children out of the public schools in order to protect them from, or expose them to, certain situations…aren't we in effect worsening the school system? Meaning, instead of getting involved in the schools in great numbers and making it so that the school MUST BE safe and tolerant, non-sexist and non-classist, aren't we making the educational world worse by taking away the badly needed voice of diversity? … Disappearing into our home, as far as I can see, is not the answer. Coming out in full force is. We can always counter the negative lessons at home, but we only help our own if we withdraw. (comments to Shenwar article, 2012)

And Michael Apple in "The Cultural Politics of HomeSchooling" (2000) critiques this inward/individual-choice-oriented turn and asks

> We need to think relationally when we ask who will be the major beneficiaries of the attack on the state and the movement toward home schooling. What if gains that are made by one group of people come at

> the expense of other, even more culturally and economically oppressed, groups? (p. 266)

Finally, Chris Lubienski (2000) adds that not only does homeschooling diminish all children's chances at a high quality education, but that homeschooling "also undermines the ability of public education to improve and become more responsive as a democratic institution" (p. 207).

There are homeschooling families and authors who disagree with this depiction of their actions and argue, on the contrary, that their efforts are actions in support of the common good.

On the issue of gender roles, there are homeschooling mothers who argue that their educational work with their children is a way for them to defy modern expectations and reshape motherhood in terms of individual choice (Bobel, 2002; Kapitulik, 2011). Others re-present the homeschooling mothers' choices as a "taking for themselves that which was not freely offered—that is, power, governance, and control as concerns important aspects of their children's education" (McDowell, 2000).

On the issue of working for the benefit of all, Hill (2000) argues that "homeschooling reduces the burdens on public schools systems and, in areas with growing populations, decreases pressure for new buildings and staff" (p. 29). Smith and Sikkink (1999) argue that homeschooled children are better democratic citizens (who serve the public/common good by helping create a vibrant public life) in that they are more involved in civic life than non-homeschooled students. And Ray (2000) submits

> that …home schooling is a good, if not the best, form of education for individuals and for society's common good. [It is better because it leads to] (a) learned children who become learned adults, (b) children who are psychologically and socially healthy …become adults who are psychologically and socially healthy, (c) hardy and hearty families, (d) liberty in a just society with a nondominant state, and (e) persons with reliable character and value systems. (p. 274)

Finally, there are also those who argue that institutionalized schooling does not currently create good public citizens (Labaree, 1997; Shapiro, 2006). Building on a Deweyan argument, these authors argue that much in our existing schools (e.g., focus on social mobility and competition, standardized tests that seek convergence of answers as opposed to divergence and critical thinking) mitigates against students developing critical democratic consciousnesses. Their arguments could thus be extended to say that when families opt out of current schools, then the chances of developing this sought-after democratic/critical consciousness is increased simply by nature of not having the children exposed to the factors that limit its development.

Safety Valve Revisited

There are authors in between the two positions above. For example, Kapitulik writes that "the most glaring contradiction of the homeschooling movement is that it simultaneously represents an act of resistance and an act of reproduction [to/of gender roles]" (p. 132). It is in this contradiction/paradox/tension that the truth may lie. Homeschooling can have the potential to both change society and maintain it—thus the safety valve's very existence is both a perpetuator of a system's legitimacy but also an opportunity for changes to come in and potentially shift the entire system.

Needed Future Research

This troubling of the comparison between homeschooling and conscientious objection to military service has, while illustrating parallels and points of departure, also raised some far-reaching questions. Clearly, there is much to explore regarding the comparison discussed herein. For example, do homeschoolers view their decisions to educate at home as political acts? Does a formal objection to a policy/law implicitly constitute acquiescence to the legitimacy of that policy? Is there a difference between objection and blatant disobedience? (Alegre, 2009). Are there other political acts, besides homeschooling, that are viewed differently depending upon what gender the key actor is? Do individual solutions to social problems blossom into full-blown social change movements that serve the common good? Does brokering one's own individual choices for her child's education ultimately serve or damage the common good?

Hopefully, other authors/researchers will engage with these and other questions, including the conclusion that homeschooling is indeed a form of conscientious objection.

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