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Inequalities of Standardized Testing

Introduction

Throughout history the education system in America has faced a plenty of inequalities by minority groups. These inequalities have become more present in today's education system with the introduction of standardized testing. Standardized tests have impacted the content taught in schools, teacher's positions and the future of students based on their scores on these tests. Standardized testing is defined as "any form of test that (1) requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from common bank of questions, in the same way, and that (2) is scored in a "standard" or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students" (edglossary.org). The inequalities that standardized testing is extremely prevalent in are the differences in social classes, stereotype threats, as well as the use of the data gained from these tests.

Social Class Inequality

America has faced the issue of unequal resources and education based on gaps in social classes. It has been proven evident through research and data that students who come from higher social classes receive an education that is of greater quality. This idea of gaps between social classes is present very often throughout society especially in the education system. The introduction of standardized tests as well as the increased importance that the test have in education makes the gap between social classes and education even more visible.

Today's public education system is home to a majority of students from lower social class status as well as students who come from a wide range of ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds. These groups are seen as a minority in America however majority in most Public schools which raises the question of why are they receiving a poorer level of education as well so many other injustices. The state of Texas has conducted many studies on the topic of

inequalities of education faced due to social classes and the results that were found were alarming but yet not surprising. The studies that were conducted within the Texas public school system found evidence-based research that “public schools continue to fail students of color and economically disadvantaged and emergent bilingual students, as evidenced by their lower rates of entry into, and completion of, post-secondary education; their lower rates of high school completion; and their disproportionately poor performance on high-stakes, standardized assessments.” (Bach 19). This is direct textual evidence that students are being penalized for coming from diverse economic statuses, races, cultures as well as speaking different languages. The education system has created this narrow supplied education for students that are not upper-middle-class white which has caused for this continuous trend to exist. In these lower-income areas, the schools do not provide the adequate tools that are needed in order for a student to succeed. These schools are often not equipped with teachers who help motivate their students to achieve their maximum potential as it is believed that these types of students will not continue to post-secondary education. But that is where change needs to occur. If students were provided the same educational tools for success that middle-class white students were provided they would be more likely to wish to continue and further their education. However a student who is crammed into a small dirty classroom that is learning from outdated damaged textbooks that do not even represent their culture, race or social class is often unmotivated to learn and dreads going to school.

Standardized Testing focuses on key topics and skills that should be taught standard across all educational platforms. A majority of the questions that are asked on these tests focus on multiliteracies. A Multiliteracies approach to literary education is when “ new information and communications technologies and social diversity shape engagements with literacy and increase “the intensity and complexity of literate environments” (Bach 20). However the implementation of this approach often falls between the gaps of social classes. Multiliteracies

approach requires the use of technology, abstract thinking as well new approaches to learning. These low-income public school educators often are not educated on new approaches to teaching in order to implement these new learning strategies with their students. This lack of education is often based on the lack of funding that the school has to send these educators out for training as well as the lack of personal funds to continue to further their education. Lack of funding is not only present in further educating teachers but also with the lack of technology that is present in these schools. Most public schools that are majority white middle-class students have an abundance of technology for their students to learn from such as smart boards, personal computers for students, as some schools even Ipad's. Schools that have a majority of underprivileged students lack the ability to provide the students and classrooms with this technology which puts the students at a disadvantage in their education especially when preparing them for the multiliteracies that are often the basis for standardized tests. Lack of educational training resources for both teachers and students as well as technological resources is a clear disadvantage in preparation for standardized testing.

The statistics that have proven to show that minority groups often score lower on standardized tests have also shaped how teachers educate in these types of schools. Teachers often want to be the teacher who breaks the cycle of their students scoring below white privileged students and shifts their teaching in order to do so. This often means teachers begin teaching to the requirements and skills that the standardized test requires rather than the content that should be taught in the classroom. Topics are often missed or skimmed over in order to focus more on the content of standardized tests. Students are also often expected to conform to the knowledge of undiverse white language and knowledge as that is the focus of the standardized tests. This idea is supported by Texas research as well as it found that

“teachers and schools toward test-centric instruction to help boost students’ scores. Test-centric instruction constrains reading and writing practices in schools by separating literacy practices into discrete and isolated tasks that are not shaped by social context. These technical views of literacy “disguise the ideologically loaded nature of

standardized literacy assessments,” which privilege a White, middle-class, monolingual variety of the English language” and disadvantage “linguistically diverse students in Texas who may speak and write non-dominant language varieties, particularly Spanish and Black English” (Bach 21).

The expectation for students to drop their language, social and cultural background in order to succeed academically according to the standardized test scores and requirements is an unfair standard to place on these young students in order to appeal to the standards of these tests.

Another prevalent phenomenon that widens the gap between social classes and the scoring on standardized testing is the zip code effect. This phenomenon is an unfair unjust way that standardized testing scores and succession of students academically based on the zip code that the student resides in. The use of this phenomenon continues to prove the unjust education system within America regarding unequal education within social classes. Within a study it was proven based on the area within the city the student lived things such as “graduation rates, dropout rates. And standardized test scores could be reality accurately predicted” (Au 1). This proves that there is a direct impact on the student’s education based on their location of residence as well as school location and resources. The continuation of the lack of adequate resources and funding to these lower-class students and schools will only lead to the continuation of lower performances on standardized tests. In 2005 a National Assessment Of Educational Process was conducted and found the results to be that” White students outscoring African American and Latino students by 26 points in scaled reading scores, by 20 points in fourth-grade mathematics scores, by 26 points in eighth-grade reading scores” (Au 4). These were national statistics therefore proving this is not a small issue in certain states but rather an issue faced by all minority students within America. In Berkeley California the experience two very different parts of California: the white rich area of Berkeley “Hills” and the lower class portion that is referred to as Berkeley “flats” a direct indication of the differences in social status within the city. In this particular city a study was done “ at the end of the school, after all of the tests scores had been tallied and after all the statistics were processed and reported

students from some zip codes seemed to do well while students from other zip codes did not” (Au 2). This study once again proved that those students who live in the zip codes that were labeled Berkeley ‘Hills’ overall had higher scores on the standardized test than those who lived in the Berkeley ‘Flats’ zip codes. This issue at hand is not only the fact that the lower class students are doing worse on these tests but rather it is also the issue of how the individual student is receiving the consequences of these inequalities throughout their academic careers. These statics should not reflect poorly on the individual students but rather the unjust system of standardized tests as a whole.

It is evident that the research completed and the data collected from city, state and national levels all show that there is a clear difference in standardized testing scores based on the social class that the student and their family are grouped into by society. The lack of funding that is available in these lower-class schools for things such as teacher training, technology and books with updated information makes it almost impossible to achieve the preparation for standardized testing that higher class students receive from their well-funded public school. These lower-class students are facing not only the overall impact of the lack of funding or preparation for these tests but also the direct impact of how their lower test scores impact their academic futures. It is clear that there is a gap between the level of preparation for standardized testing that each social class receives but the question now is what is going to be done to close the gap and fix the issue.

Stereotype Threats

Society in America over time has become a society in which everyone is judged. Most of the judgments take place from stereotypes in which are a preconceived idea

regarding an individual or group of individuals based on previous actions of others as the basis of the judgment. People consistently face stereotypes regarding an individual's social class, race, culture, physical appearance. Some may believe that stereotypes are not that harmful however they often pose a threat in an individual's life especially within student's lives. When reminded of these stereotypes students often begin to fear confirming the stereotypes and falling into similar actions that these people believed they would simply based on their race, social class, or ethnic background. The lingering thought of these stereotypes creates a true threat with a direct negative correlation to minority students' performances on standardized tests.

The presence of stereotypes has been prominent in society in regard to African American's lives throughout the majority of history. These stereotypes have seeped into the education system in which "African Americans have consistently been stereotyped as unintelligent and lazy. This stereotype has served as the basis for the group to be denied equal access and opportunity within our education system" (Ahorlu 383). These stereotypes that are experienced by African American students impact them in a negative manner as "stereotypes cannot only harm African Americans in the physical realm, but they can have psychological consequences as well" (Ahorlu 383). By a student being labeled lazy or unintelligent before even having the ability to prove what type of student they are often leading to a diminished ambition of the student. Students often recognize these stereotypes and feel as though if they are not going to be recognized for their hard work and dedication just because of a stereotype that is misconceived by the color of their skin, culture or social class then why even try at all. This is often when these stereotypes seem to become true from the outsider's perspective because they see a lack of achievement and motivation and the students fall into the cycle of misconstrued stereotypes rather than breaking the cycle and proving to be different. Studies have been conducted in order to prove how harmful these stereotype threats can be to these

young student's' academic success in which it was proven that “ In educational environments, the anxiety of inadvertently confirming a stereotype has been shown to interfere with and depress academic achievement in many ways. The most widely researched consequence of stereotype threat is its power to impair academic performance.” (Ahorlu 383). This impairment of academic performance is highlighted even further in standardized testing results.

Research that has been done on standardized testing scores difference between races, social classes and ethnic groups has shown there is an obvious issue however it has since made the issue worse. These results have been the cause of the creation about these stereotypes as well as it has made the students aware about what is being said about their academic performances. By highlighting the difference of score difference between a middle-class white student and a lower-class African American student it placed a great deal of stress on the African American to succeed. This stress of succession impacts the student in such extreme manners that “when confronted with a standardized college entrance examination, the student believes that poor performance on the exam will reinforce the negative stereotype. This fear creates such a high level of stress and anxiety that a student’s cognitive function may be impaired while taking the test and the student may perform below his or her actual ability” (Kirwan Institute). These stakes of proving the stereotype to be correct impact the cognitive ability of the student in such a negative manner they do not even start on an even playing field emotionally when beginning the exam. If a teacher who was giving an exam stated to the students while handing out the exam that out of all their classes today no one has passed the exam it would place fear within the heads of the students impacting their results. However no teacher does that because it is believed to be unjust and wrong to instill fear in students without reason. Raising the question of why is society continuing to use these stereotypes threats that impact these students in such a negative manner impacting their cognitive ability, and emotional well-being when it is clear that it is unjust and unfair. Students in these minority

groups that are from the lower-class society and different races and cultures should be supported by society to achieve their maximum success rather than be taunted for what society predicts to happen with their standardized testing scores.

It is clear after looking at the research and data that has been compiled on the topic of stereotype threats impacting students' scores on standardized tests that this is a major issue that occurs within the education system. These unfair, unjust prejudgements that society has created for students of lower-class minority families has placed a great deal of stress within their lives. This stress has prevented and continues to prevent the students from achieving their maximum potential on standardized tests. The unfair construction of the standardized tests already put minority low-class students at a disadvantage and the constructs of society's stereotypes only add to the stress of the students hurting their academic success.

The Impact of Standardized Testing Scores on the Future of Minority Students

Not only are standardized tests unfair with how they are created but there are some injustices are present with how these tests and their results are used especially for minorities and students from lower social classes. Standardized tests are used to predict the succession of students in their academics as well as often used in college applications. The inequalities that minority students face make it unfair to base their academic performance on a test that is not meant for them to succeed. Not only do these tests impact the students emotionally throughout their schooling but they also can change their futures and impact their ability to attend college due to their scores.

Research has been conducted to see how all students' performance in schools compared to their scores on standardized testing. This research has shown “SAT verbal and math subtests explained, on the average, only 11.9% of the variance of first year college grades” (Giffore 246). This research considered all students into consideration when finding that only a

very minor amount of students testing scores accurately represent how they perform in college. This 11.9% mostly represents the white upper to middle-class students who these tests are designed for their succession. This research conducted proves further that these tests are unjust in predicting the future of students when the future they predict is only accurate for 11.9% of students. These Tests however are what is used for a majority of the basis of colleges to decide which students they are going to accept therefore impacting minority students negatively. Low SAT or ACT scores that minority students often have can be seen as a red flag for colleges as they believe they are not strong students and not going to succeed. However this is often not the case the students who are given a chance to attend the university despite low standardized testing scores excel in their first year of college. Proving their standardized testing scores to be wrong and that they do not fit into that 11.9%. However if a school does not choose to ignore a low score on the standardized tests and does not give the student the opportunity to attend their college or university the student often becomes another number in the statistics of minority students not furthering their education. It is important to highlight that the statistics of minority students who do not attend college is not because they do not want to further their education but rather because they do not have access to further their education whether it be because of finances or acceptance into universities.

The idea of implementing policies for test-only admission has been brought up by many colleges however that would change college completely. After research was conducted it was shown that “ a test-only admissions policy would increase the share of white students at top colleges from 66% to 75%, and the combined share of black and Latino students would decrease from 19% to 11%. The share of Asian students would fall slightly, from 11% to 10%” (Camera). The implication of this policy would be detrimental to minority students as the ability to receive an education further than high school would be even more difficult than it already is for this group of students. This idea was created in order to try and diminish any

future admissions scandals from occurring. It is believed that Student's families should not have the ability to pay for their child's acceptance into a college. However high privileged white students have the privilege of their parents paying for private tutors, prep classes as well as other things to prepare them for the standardized tests. This indirectly allows them to pay for their child's acceptance since lower-class minority students do not have the ability to have the same preparation. The only thing that implementing this idea would do is " further privilege in the higher education system." (Camera). The introduction of this policy would negatively impact the students' future as well as change the dynamic of college campuses as a whole.

What Changes Can Be Made to Fix the Injustices of Standardized Testing

It is evident that injustices are present for minority lower-class students within the creation, administration and calculations of Standardized testing. Change needs to be made in order to prevent these students from continuously being used as a statistic and ammunition of society's stereotypes. The future and academic success of these students is just as important as any other group of students and it is time for society, the education system and standardized tests to acknowledge that too.

The impact of stereotype threats seems to have the most prominent effect on students and their ability to perform to their maximum potential on these unjust examinations. In order to reduce these stereotype threats as an educator you can advise your students "not to fill out demographic questions on the test, asking students to think of areas in their lives where they are successful, and emphasizing growth mindset" (Choi). By avoiding the questions regarding demographics it will allow students to not be focused on where they are from and the stereotypes associated with where they reside right before beginning the exam. This will also help diminish the creation of stereotypes that are created off the results of the standardized tests because the statistics will not be able to be formed if they do not know the demographic

questions about the students. This should also alleviate the zip code effect as they will not know the zip code of the students to make predictions about future test takers from the same area. Although this will not solve the issue of the tests themselves being unjust it is a good starting point for change.

Another recommendation that has been made in order to reduce the rate of anxiety in getting into college with test scores that are not as high is to apply to test-optional schools or schools that do not look at testing scores. This will provide the student with a higher chance of acceptance without low standardized test scores from being a barrier to them. The more attention that test-optional schools receive the more popular they will become. If a student chooses to apply to a test-optional school rather than a school that requires testing scores the schools that require the tests are more likely to make a change to their policy in order to receive more attention and get more applicants. This idea is a strong step in the plan to exterminate Standardized testing as a whole in the future.

The presence of Covid-19 has impacted everyone's lives tremendously especially students' lives in regards to education. When Covid-19 hit the United States it shook up the education system greatly. Not only did it make virtual learning necessary but it also placed a halt on the administration of Standardized Testing. This left many students unable to report standardized testing scores to universities. The lack of scores to report forced “more than half of all four-year colleges and universities to drop their mandate for a standardized test score, at least for the current application cycle.”(huntinstitute.org). This is proof that it is possible for schools to ignore the unfair standardized tests and rather focus on things such as personal statement essays, letters of recommendation and, high school GPAs which are a better representation of the student’s abilities. This has provided proof that there is no need for these standardized tests which create so many injustices for low-class minority students and with continuous support and fighting standardized testing can be eliminated.

Conclusion

All in all the education system in America is far from perfect and needs to be re-evaluated in order to be fair to all. Injustices have always been present in the education system however they have been even more prevalent since the introduction and increased importance of standardized testing. The inequalities that standardized testing is extremely prevalent in are the differences in social classes, stereotype threats, as well as the use of the data gained from these tests. In order to revise the system and limit these inequalities that minority low-class students face it is important for students to avoid the demographic questions and apply to schools that are test-optional. Standing up against standardized testing can help eliminate the injustices and protect the future of minority lower-class students.

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