

Why Do Children of Some Minorities Have Weak Academic Performance?

By Philip Carl Salzman

Today the official governmental and university definition of “justice” is representation in government, industry, and education of members of all racial, gender, sexual, and ethnic categories according to their percentage of the population. In this “social justice” view, there is no justice until 50 or more percent of every enterprise and organization are female, and people of colour, indigenous natives, gays, lesbians, and transsexuals, Muslims, Sikhs, and other minorities are all present at the same percentage as their presence in the general public. This policy is dignified as “diversity and inclusion.”

If members of any category are not represented at least by their percentage in the general population, “social justice” theory assumes that this is the result of bigotry and discrimination. Those who are deemed, on the basis of their percentage of the population, to be “overrepresented,” are judged unjustly “privileged,” and should “stay silent” and “step back.”

However, the evidence indicates that it is false that “overrepresentation” is the result of privilege and supported by discrimination against the “other.” African Americans are highly overrepresented in American and Canadian professional sports, but not because African Americans are privileged, and not because whites and Asians are discriminated against. Jews and Asians are highly overrepresented in prestigious professions in North America, but not because they are privileged, given the discrimination they have historically suffered, or because Christians and Euro-Canadians are discriminated against.¹ The “social justice” explanation of statistical under- and overrepresentation misrepresents reality, and at best is largely false.

People have preferences and, whenever possible, make choices according to those preferences. The average person in a particular racial, gender, sexuality, or ethnic category might make different choices from the average person in other categories. For example, feminists and “diversity” advocates have shrilly insisted that females are underrepresented in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields, that this is due to discrimination against females, and that special measures must be taken to increase females to fifty percent. But what the evidence shows is that by a two to one ratio scientists would favor female applicants over male applicants.²

In fact, females do not choose STEM, preferring the social sciences, where they are highly overrepresented. An international survey shows that, countries with the highest level of gender equality, such as the Nordic countries, females choose STEM much less frequently than do females in developing countries.³ Thus, the truth is that females are not discriminated against in entering STEM fields, but prefer other fields to STEM. According to psychological studies, the clearest difference between males and females is that males are

¹ <https://fcpp.org/2018/12/14/why-do-some-succeed/>

² <http://www.pnas.org/content/112/17/5360>

³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/02/the-more-gender-equality-the-fewer-women-in-stem/553592/>

interested in things and females are interested in people.⁴

“Diversity” advocates argue that African Americans and Hispanics (AA/H) are “underrepresented” in higher education, and that this is a result of “structural racism,” an amorphous discrimination invented by sociologists to explain different results by people in different categories. In order to increase the representation of AA/H in universities, they have been admitted with lower qualifications than whites and Asians under programs called “affirmative action”⁵ (although President Kennedy’s “affirmative action” presidential order required government contractors to “take **affirmative action** to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated during employment **without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin.**” [emphasis added])⁶

The academic records of African Americans and Hispanics generally are weaker than whites and Asians. For example, in College Board Examinations, the average score for African Americans was 946, for Hispanics 990, for whites 1123, for Asians 1223.⁷ “Social justice” diversity advocates claim that differences of performance are due to “structural racism,” although AA/H students are not being discriminated against in their tests. Are there other possible explanations? Could the African American and Hispanic subcultures—beliefs, values, and goals—be less education-oriented than those of whites and Asians?

It is well known that Asian Americans families on average are strongly education oriented, and have high educational expectations for their children.⁸ Commitment and discipline directed to education are high.⁹ Jews also have a family and community culture that stresses the value of education, and this results in the “overrepresentation” of Jews in academia and other professions. The academic performance of Jewish students is at a high standard. For example, New York Regents’ examination scores for English, math, science, and history are much higher for students in Yeshivas, orthodox Jewish schools, than in public schools (Yeshiva test scores were in the high 80s and low 90s, while the public school scores were in the high 50s or low 60s.)¹⁰

One argument is that there is a widespread bias against education in the African American community; studying, conforming to the rules of schools, and wishing to continue to higher education is regarded as “acting white,” and thus betraying black culture and the black community.¹¹ This is contested by arguments that suggest such “word play” has in reality no effect on academic performance.¹²

However that may be, the difficulties in many black communities are serious: 66% of African American children were raised in one-parent homes (compared to 16% in Asian and Pacific Islander, and 24% in non-Hispanic white homes).¹³ It is well documented that children raised in single-parent homes, compared with those in two-parent homes, are more likely to suffer a range of deleterious consequences, including lower academic performance.¹⁴

Furthermore, many African American communities are major crime zones, with gangs, drugs, and almost half

⁴ <http://epaper.nationalpost.com/national-post-latest-edition/20181215/textview>

⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/08/02/actually-we-still-need-affirmative-action-for-african-americans-in-college-admissions-heres-why/?utm_term=.f7bf3244bcde

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_Order_10925

⁷ <https://reports.collegeboard.org/sat-suite-program-results/class-2018-results>

⁸ <https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/02/13/asian-americans-excel-education/23367177/>

⁹ <http://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-102>

¹⁰ http://www.jewishpress.com/news/us-news/ny/regents-scores/2018/12/12/?utm_source=spotim&utm_medium=spotim_recirculation&spotim_referrer=recirculation&spotim_comment_id=sp_Z3ieP5nt_406671_c_jqT3sV

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acting_white

¹² https://www.jstor.org/stable/41341152?read-now=1&seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents

¹³ <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/107-children-in-single-parent-families-by#detailed/1/any/false/870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38,35,18/10,11,9,12,1,185,13/432,431>

¹⁴ <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/are-children-raised-with-absent-fathers-worse-off/>

of the national homicides (most black on black).¹⁵ Many African Americans struggle with a difficult environment, and this cannot be conducive to strong focus on education. We must consider the impact of environment and subculture in trying to explain weaker academic performance among African Americans. Invoking “institutional racism” simplistically blames someone else, without looking at the influencing factors.

Hispanics too face some challenging conditions. 42% of Hispanic children grow up in one-parent families.¹⁶ Family pressures often emphasize contributing to family income rather than pursuing education.¹⁷ The culture of Hispanic families thus must be considered in explaining the weaker results and “underrepresentation” of Hispanics in higher education.

The Moynihan Report: The Negro Family—The Case for National Action, published in 1965, argued that “The fundamental problem... is that of family structure. The evidence--not final but powerfully persuasive--is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling.”¹⁸ At that time, the percentage of one-parent families among African Americans was 25%, as opposed to 66% in 2016.

The negative response in 1965 to the Moynihan Report, that it ignored “structural racism” and was “blaming the victim,” was surprising and a bit shocking. But today we are long accustomed to blaming “society” for any ills that people suffer, and exonerating individuals for their choices and the consequences that result. For “underrepresented” African Americans and Hispanics we place all blame on “structural racism,” bigotry, and discrimination. The problem with this explanation is that people in other categories who have suffered from overt bigotry, racism, and discrimination have succeeded to the point where they are “overrepresented” in prestigious sectors of society. So there has to be more to it than racism and discrimination.

The reality is that North America today is as open a society as has ever existed, and members of every category have succeeded. Today 55% of African American households rank economically as middle class or above.¹⁹ Hispanics too²⁰ have been economically upward mobile, with at least half middle class or above.²¹ So the blanket assertion that “structural racism” is keeping AA/H down and making them “underrepresented” minorities appears highly exaggerated and largely false.

For most people of all categories, present author not excepted, there is no strong impulse to take responsibility for their choices and the consequences of those choices. It is much more comfortable to absolve oneself of unpleasant consequences, and find the causes in other people, or circumstances, or “the system.” In our current neo-marxist culture, we always look to “oppressors” who are to blame for the unfortunate effects on “victims.” In fact, we currently have a fevered competition among people in various categories for “victim” status. But does the claim of victim status really exonerate people for bad choices?

It might be most instructive to compare community and family cultures in AA/H students who perform at an academically high level, with those whose academic performance is weaker, to see to what extent community and family culture explain those differences. If African American and Hispanic students are on average comparatively weaker in their academic work, we need to look at parental and familial preferences and choices as influences.

¹⁵ <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s./2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-3.xls>

¹⁶ <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/107-children-in-single-parent-families-by#detailed/1/any/false/870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38,35,18/10,11,9,12,1,185,13/432,431>

¹⁷ https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2018/10/why_the_hispanic_education_gap.html

¹⁸ https://www.amazon.ca/Moynihan-Report-Family-National-Action/dp/1945934298/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1545073213&sr=8-3&keywords=daniel+patrick+moynihan

¹⁹ <http://blackdemographics.com/households/middle-class/>

²⁰ <https://money.cnn.com/2018/06/22/news/economy/hispanic-social-mobility/index.html>

²¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2018/02/27/the-middle-class-is-becoming-race-plural-just-like-the-rest-of-america/>

About the Author



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