THE EXAMINED LIFE:
UNDERSTANDING STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON TESTING

By

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THE EXAMINED LIFE: UNDERSTANDING STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON
STANDARDIZED TESTING

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**ABSTRACT**

The goal of this thesis is to understand students' perceptions of examinations and how they affect their lives. Based on the lack of research regarding student perceptions of testing events, it is assumed that the student's voice has been perceived to be unimportant by researchers. Therefore, by conducting a document analysis and interviews with nine undergraduate students, this thesis seeks to enhance the research on the subject. Specifically, it explores two questions: how does the outcome of one examination event relate to the timing, preparation, and outcome of the next examination; and how have examination events impacted students over the life course and/or their perception of opportunities available to them. The data were categorized into four themes: how students prepare for a future test following a previous, perceived failure; how students prepare for a future test following a previous, perceived success; a student's self-concept, external inputs, and future prospects following a perceived failure on a testing event; and a student's self-concept, external inputs, and future prospects following a perceived success on a testing event. The data were analyzed using a conceptual framework based on aspects of Michel Foucault, F. Allan Hanson, and Caroline Bledsoe's work. This framework relates internal and external influences on the formation of the self-concept, the transformative effect of testing, and the relationship between testing events. The data indicates that the cumulative effect of testing results in a student's understanding of their opportunities and limitations across the life course.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

# CHAPTER 1 ~ THE EXAMINED SYSTEM

*Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts (Cameron 1963; also attributed to Albert Einstein, 1879-1955).*

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The concept of intelligence is widely accepted among Americans as an innate quality of the human mind. It is easily quantified through intelligence tests, after all there is the perception that "numbers don't lie" (Thomas 2004:12). This comfort level with numbers and measurements has led American's to believe that if there is a number to prove something then it must be real. The wide acceptance of intelligence tests as methods to quantify, classify, and rank people based on these attributes has fostered a belief founded in psychology that intelligence is a single biological entity. This concept has become ingrained into American society, and is reflected in behaviors and thoughts that are expressed surrounding intelligence. But the simplistic view of this concept begins to be altered when social scientists question whether intelligence is a naturally formed reality or rather, an artificial reality created by cultural constructs.

> For the most part, human beings regulate their affairs in terms of conventions or agreements they have established among themselves…rather than according to the dictates of external reality…Indeed, what external reality is understood to be and appropriate methods for knowing it are themselves matters of social convention. The concept of intelligence…is conventional not only because it is commonplace but also in the sense that it is one example of a social convention or tacit agreement in terms of which human affairs are regulated (Hanson 1993:282; see also Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Given importance assigned to intelligence, intelligence tests have become an significant factor in regulating and allocating scarce resources in societies such as America (Hanson

1993:283). The ways that intelligence tests are typically studied are quantitative and interested in improving tests and making them more equitable and efficient. Some studies do look at how tests influence certain groups based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, and class. However, the students' perspective on how tests influence their lives has largely been left out of previous research. This project intends to engage the voice of the students who actually experience testing and to understand how students perceived testing to influences their lives.

I would like to begin with a few definitions. First, I will need to define what I mean by the term "test"; which will be used interchangeably in this thesis with the terms "exam" and "examination". F. Allan Hanson provided a concise definition of this term in his book, *Testing Testing: Social Consequences of the Examined Life.* "All tests are means of gathering information…[They] contain the condition of intent: they are planned, arranged, given, or conducted by someone with some purpose in mind… [However,] a test is a special sort of investigation in which the information that is collected is not itself the information that one seeks, but is instead a *representation* of it" (Hanson 1993:17-18). A test result, therefore, is a representation of the information it seeks to gather.

Next, I feel the need to differentiate between two types of testing that will be discussed in this thesis, achievement testing and aptitude testing. Achievement testing is a representation of how much someone has learned about a specific subject; and is directly linked to a school's (or other entity's) educational goals. These tests are typically created either by a teacher (i.e. chapter tests, final examinations, etc.) or by an outside entity (in the form of a standardized test), and are used to measure how much the student has learned over a specified period of time (Cole 1986:76-77; see also Hanson 1993:274).

Aptitude testing (also may be referred to as ability or intelligence testing), is most commonly associated directly with intelligence and the ability to learn. The most important difference between achievement testing and aptitude testing is that achievement testing is intended to represent actual learning on specific subject matter whereas aptitude testing is intended to measure the ability to learn in general (Hanson 1993:274). An especially revealing fact about aptitude testing is that, "if one examines the contents of the major intelligence tests currently in use, one will find that most of them measure intelligence as last year's (or the year before's, [*sic*] or the year before that's) achievement. What is an intelligence test for children of a given age would be an achievement test for children a few years younger" (Sternberg 1985 as quoted in Hanson 1993:275). Therefore, the true distinction between achievement tests and aptitude tests is a blurry and complex issue. However, a further discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Before I address students' perspectives of testing directly, it is helpful to begin by framing this information within the historical and conceptual ideas about testing which have influenced and guided my study. The following review of literature will demonstrate how integrated testing has become within US culture. It will present the history of testing in the United States, and look at several ways testing has been approached as a subject for research. It will conclude by presenting the conceptual framework that will be used throughout this study.

*Historical examinations*

Records of testing date back to the Chinese civil service examination as early as the Chou dynasty (ca. 1122-256 B.C.) (Garrison 2009:10; Hanson 1993:186-191). However, the first written examination in the Unites States can be traced to Boston, 1845, and Horace Mann, secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. During this time, pressures resulting from the

rapidly increasing number of children in schools were causing the traditional oral examinations to become impractical. Thus, Mann proposed that a standardized, short-answer, written examination should replace the oral examinations. A welcome solution, the written examination quickly became the norm for assessing both student and teacher performance (Garrison 2009:59-72; Hanson 1993:196; Resnick 1982:179-180; Sacks 1999:70-71).

In addition to written achievement testing, aptitude testing was also being developed during this time period. Alfred Binet, a French psychologist, developed a method of predicting children who would not succeed in the school system. He developed a scale of normal behavior, established by making observations and performing tests on children. In 1905, Binet published a scale of thirty questions of increasing difficulty which measured students' capacity for abstract thinking depending on how many questions they were able to answer. This test was designed to remove children of insufficient intelligence from conventional classrooms, with the idea that these children would benefit from special education classes (Resnick 1982:176).

By 1910, the dependability and subjectivity of both aptitude and achievement tests were becoming a highly debated issue. The short-answer examinations were perceived to be too subjective to be able to accurately compare or classify students. Though the aptitude tests of the day were perceived to employ more objective measurements procedures, based on their ability to scale students against a set of norms (such as Binet's scale), the arduous one-on-one technique they utilized was not suitable to be used with a large group of test takers (Resnick 1982:182; Samelson 1987:118-119). However, these problems were soon solved by the invention of the multiple choice test.

Frederick J. Kelly, director of Training School at the State Normal School at Emporia, KS, who would later become the Dean of Education at the University of Kansas, was the first

person to develop a multiple choice test. In 1914-1915, Kelly created the Kansas Silent Reading Test. Kelly's primary goal in developing this test was to improve upon existing reading tests, specifically, "the reduction of time and effort in the test's administration and scoring" (Samelson 1987:118-119). Almost at the same time, in 1917, the American Psychological Association's Committee on Methods of Psychological Examining of Recruits developed a test known as the Army Alpha that implemented a very similar solution to Kelly's Silent Reading Test. Answers to test questions on the Army Alpha would be selected from among previously designated answer selections, and the tests would be quickly scored by clerical workers using superimposed stencils (Samelson 1987:116; see also Hanson 1993:211; Sacks 1999:29-32). These newly developed multiple choice tests could both be easily administered to large groups of test takers, and quickly scored by following a set of "objective" parameters, enabling test takers to easily be compared and ranked according to their test scores.

Utilizing these important advances in testing, the Army Alpha enabled 1.7 million military recruits to be tested. These scores were converted into a measurement of the recruit's "mental age", and "psychologists made recommendations such as which recruits were intelligent enough to qualify for officer training and which ones should be assigned for special labor duty or discharged outright on the grounds of mental incompetence" (Hanson 1993:211-212). Following World War I, similar tests begun being used in schools. These aptitude tests allowed students to be quickly measured, compared, and placed on a tracking system based on their results (Resnick 1982:182).

From 1935-1942, E. F. Lindquist developed a series of tests designed to measure a broad range of abilities that could be used to monitor and measure primary and secondary school children. The tests were designed to be given in the fall "so that the work of the school year

could be adapted to the strengths and deficits of the individual student" (Resnick 1982:189).

These tests included the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Iowa Test of Educational

Development (ITED). The ITBS and ITED tests could be considered two of the forerunners to

the yearly examinations used to monitor student progress in contemporary schools.

Around the time that the Army Alpha was being developed, colleges across the country

were also dealing with a major dilemma; how to handle the significant increase in applicants. "In

1870, there were about 80,000 students in…[high schools], most of them in private institutions.

By 1910, there were 900,000 students in secondary schools, about 90 percent in public

institutions" (Resnick 1982:187). This dramatic increase placed tremendous strain on the college

admissions process. Earlier admissions processes might have included a written examination

given on the college's own campuses, a faculty member may have been sent to inspect and

certify an applicant's high school, or an applicant's record may have been compared to other

applicants from the same high school (Resnick 1982:187). However, these processes had become

too inefficient to handle the dramatic increase in applicants. In 1899, a College Entrance

Examination Board was created to standardize the process for all participating colleges, utilizing

a standardized, essay-based examination. The success of the Army Alpha prompted Carl

Brigham of Princeton University to develop the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) for the College

Board (Hanson 1993:212-221; Resnick 1982:188-189; Sacks 1999:32). Beginning with the first

administration of the SAT in 1926, and gaining momentum with the later developed American

College Testing Program (ACT), standardized testing quickly became a typical requirement for

entrance to colleges and universities across the United States.

*Modern-day testing*

Since the introduction of written tests to the American educational system in 1845, the number of tests students are exposed to on a regular basis has gradually increased. This has been due, in part, to government regulations. In 1989, President George H. W. Bush and the nation's governors convened to establish a set of six national education goals to be accomplished by the year 2000. This initiative was going to help prove the United States' intellectual prowess. Among the educational goals were to ensure that all students entered school healthy and ready to learn, that at least 90 percent of students graduated from high school, that all students were competent in the academic disciplines, and that the United States ranked "first in the world in mathematics and science achievement" (Darling-Hammond 2010:14). However by 2011, these goals had yet to be realized. With the high school graduation rate falling below 70% and the most recent US scores on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) hovering around the 23$^{rd}$ ranking, the reality is that in many ways the educational system has not improved over the past two decades (Darling-Hammond 2010:14; Dillon 2010).

In 2001, President Bush's 1989 initiative was given renewed strength with the passing of President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. Major goals of the act were to reduce the "learning gap" and assure that students were taught by "highly qualified teachers" (Finn and Hess 2004:35). The act enabled a complete overhaul of the federal role in education by requiring every student in grades three through eight to be tested in reading, mathematics, and science every year. Currently, under law, every publically funded school is assessed based on their students' test scores. The school is required to make "adequate yearly progress" towards improving students' test scores or the school will face sanctions. Schools are expected to be

making adequate progress towards the federally mandated goal that 100 percent of US students will be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014 (Finn and Hess 2004:36).

The NCLB act applies a basic business model to US schools which theoretically monitors and increases productivity (Nichols and Berliner 2008:42). Standardized testing would enable teachers and administrators to be held accountable and students would be forced to work harder. "For many Americans, these policies seemed sensible and worth pursuing, so it was easy to buy into the high-stakes accountability movement" (Nichols and Berliner 2008:42-43). However, though these ideas seemed sensible, according to Nicholas and Berliner, business models simply do not work very well when applied to educational settings. Contrary to the business world, in education, instructors have little control over the input, i.e. what their students have learned before, the student's background, etc. (2008:43). "The high-stakes tests, with their threats and incentives to boost productivity, are not well matched to the ways our schools operate. Thus scores on tests will mislead us about genuine productivity. But it all sounds sensible and so appeals to many citizens who end up supporting high-stakes testing programs for our schools" (Nichols and Berliner 2008:43).

Regardless of whether NCLB has improved education in the United States, it has certainly has resulted in increasing the amount of standardized testing children are exposed to. Thus, the United States has been an ideal place to study standardized testing, and the impact of testing on students' lives.

For example, an interesting study that attempted to understand the effects of praise on students was built on a concept in which humans understand intelligence via one of two theories (or a combination of the two): an entity theory and an incremental theory. A person who has an entity theory of intelligence would believe that intelligence is fixed and cannot be changed due to

9

effort. However, a person who has an incremental theory of intelligence would believe that is malleable and can be changed due to effort (Kamins and Dweck 1999; Mueller and Dweck 1998). A person with an entity theory of intelligence would endeavor to appear smart at all costs; failure or needing to exert effort would indicate that this person had a low intelligence level. Conversely, for a person with an incremental theory of intelligence, failure would indicate that the person did not exert enough effort and the exertion of effort indicates that the person is using their intelligence (Dweck 2000; Mueller and Dweck 1998).

Though it is common for people to have a theory of intelligence that falls somewhere between these two extremes, it is typical for Americans to tend to lean towards an entity theory of intelligence. By sharing aspects of the entity theory of intelligence, Americans may interpret failure on standardized testing as a reflection of the country's lack of intellectual capital to the rest of the world.

Though these two theories of intelligence are psychological in nature, I would argue that the understanding and use of them is a social phenomenon.  In looking at how intelligence has been conceptualized in society, Hanson argues that the concept of intelligence, as a unique thing, comes from the practice of referring to it in singular terms and identifying it in terms of single numbers (Hanson 1993:276).

> Quite clearly, this is an example of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. This is the error of assuming that where there is a name – in this case, "intelligence" – and a number, there must be some unique, preexisting phenomenon to which the name and number refer…When we look at intelligence from a sociocultural perspective – as a product of social institutions rather than a property of the individual…intelligence emerges again as a single thing…The main difference is that a sociocultural view denies the preexistence of intelligence; it takes intelligence to be constructed by the test instead of somehow discovered by it. So the formulation becomes that for every possible intelligence test, there is an "intelligence" out there that is fabricated by it (Hanson 1993:276-278).

Regardless as to whether intelligence is indeed a preexisting phenomenon or not, it is a

commonly held belief among Americans, and as such behaviors which stem from this belief

must be given consideration in this thesis.

Certainly, the concept of intelligence has been approached by several authors as a

culturally constructed phenomenon. Peter Sacks, for example, pondered, "could then,

'intelligence,' as it's measured on common IQ tests be largely a culturally acquired trait, say, not

unlike the taste for fine wine" (Sacks 1999:58)? Similarly, if we were to understand intelligence

in terms of a conceptual definition, it would be understood to be "anything we say it is", and its

value stems from its perceived ability to predict "with varying success" the likelihood people

will succeed in various capacities (Bernard 2006:38-40).

> The key to understanding the last statement is the phrase "with varying success." It is by
> now well known that measures of intelligence are culture bound' the standard U.S.
> intelligence tests are biased in favor of Whites and against African Americans because of
> differences in access to education and differences in life experiences. Further afield,
> intelligence tests that are designed for Americans may not have any meaning at all to
> people in radically different cultures (Bernard 2006:38-40).

Indeed, these authors' concepts of intelligence are very different than the traditional

psychological perception of intelligence as a biological entity that exists regardless of culture.

However, they will be significant in interpreting how students perceive testing events.

Among the plethora of research on standardized testing, themes examined include: group

differences in IQ testing (Hedges and Nowell 1995), stereotype threat (Steele 1999), test anxiety

(Cassady 2004; Hembree 1988), socioeconomic status, home environment and its correlation to

test scores (Brooks-Gunn, et al. 1996), criticism about the limited definition of intelligence and

how it is tested (Gardner 1993). The breadth of knowledge about testing is remarkable.

Certainly, anthropologists are not new to studying child development, educational structures, and

high school or college student experiences (see Chase 2008; Moffatt 1989; Nathan 2005; Ortner 2003);  however, when I began researching students' perceptions of testing and how it affects their lives, I was surprised to find that this is an area that we know very little about. Based on the lack of research about students' perceptions of testing events within these documents as well as the majority of other articles addressed in this thesis, I have come to assume that there is a gap in the research when it comes to students' perceptions about testing. This thesis will engage in understanding the social constructs which influence students' perceptions, specifically pertaining to testing events, and the opportunities and limitations they represent. Additionally, it will provide a voice to this otherwise voiceless group whose lives are impacted by testing events and have yet to be heard.

*The examination's normalizing gaze*

When I began my research, one of the first theories I went to was that of Michel Foucault. In *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault discusses the examination in terms of how it is utilized by a disciplinary power to "train" its subjects. This is accomplished through disciplinary powers of hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment enacted through the examination (Foucault 1995:170). "The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (Foucault 1995:184).

Foucault's argument maintains that the examination is a mode of disciplinary power that it is used to assert power over those subjected to it, in that those subjects are visible (Foucault 1995:184). This represents a shift in the direction of power, a shift in the "gaze" of power. Previously, people had looked toward outward displays of power (e.g. the king, public

executions) for guidance. Now, however, power is exercised through invisible, continuous disciplinary technologies which maintain those subjected to it through normalizing judgment and observing hierarchy. The state is only one aspect of this disciplinary power; it exists in a "conditioning-conditioned" relationship with other power networks such as "family, kinship, knowledge and technology" (Foucault 1984:64). The state, as a "kind of 'metapower'…is structured essentially around a certain number of great prohibition functions; but this metapower with its prohibitions can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power" (Foucault 1984:64). Thus, the disciplinary power which maintains the norms asserted through the examination extends "beyond the limitations of the state" (Foucault 1984:64).

Next, Foucault argues that the examination is normalizing. Disciplinary power preserves the norms that individuals are expected to fulfill, and against which they are judged. However, under the examination's gaze, the individual, is able to be documented in unprecedented ways: "the calculation of the gaps between individuals [and] their distribution in a given 'population'" (Foucault 1995:190). Finally, this process results in individualizing the person; this individual can be "described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality; and it is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc." (Foucault 1995:191). The subject is individualized and yet normalized based on the corrections and classifications the examination exerts. Thus, based on Foucault's descriptions, we can describe the examination as a mode of surveillance and power, it is normalizing, and it is individualizing.

The type of examples Foucault refers to in his work are what he considered to be "complete and austere institutions;" for example, disciplined barracks, prisons, and strict schools. These institutions deprive the individual of liberty and subject the individual to reformative transformations (Foucault 1995:233-235). However, the individuals in my study (from public schools and universities) enjoy relative freedoms when compared to these "complete and austere" institutions. These freedoms likely result in several differences; nevertheless, I have chosen to focus on one specific difference, the individual's self-concept. Foucault argues that external judgments and exertions of power primarily influence an individual's behavior within the norms of a society; however, my argument that these external forces, paired with the individuals' perceptions, or their self-concept, forms a more complete picture of what influences these individuals' behaviors.

I intend to build on Foucault's theoretical ideas on education and examinations and take them one step further. Foucault sees the individual case as being formed by comparing and classifying entirely based on outside judgments; however, throughout this thesis, I will show that there are two sides to this argument. The individual is also capable of forming a self-concept dependent on an internal understanding of their performance on an examination in addition to external inputs based on social norms, peer pressure, teacher and parent pressures, etc. (personal communication Hanson 2011). These self-concepts influence decisions people will make about their lives. Although I do concede that the self-concept these individuals are forming is contingent on social norms which influence the individual's understanding of what a particular score on a test may or may not mean, the important distinction I intend to make between Foucault's theory and my own is that the individual is capable of developing a self-concept, and this self-concept is not solely the result of the direct influence of power on that person.

Before proceeding, I would like to define what I mean by "self-concept". An individual's self-concept includes perceptions about their abilities and inabilities, as well the opportunities that are available to them and the limitations that preclude them. An individual's self-concept is influenced by complex accumulation of cultural influences, which do include external qualifications surrounding race, gender, and class. However, for this thesis I will focus specifically on how testing, as a cultural construction, influences an individual's self-concept.

In discussing the factors that lead to self-concept formation, I will use the terms, internal influences and external influences. External influences refer to the parents, teachers, peers, the state, etc. which set cultural expectations and define specific parameters of conduct. Internal influences refer to a person's interpretation of how these external restrictions apply to oneself. For example, this study specifically looks at how testing events influence students' lives. As I have explained above, Foucault builds his case for the examination in that it is a mode of the disciplinary technology of power. I will argue the types of external powers, including parents, teachers, and peers, who are encompassed in his argument do set the framework for the opportunities and limitations a student is exposed to. However, within this framework the student still has choices. These choices, though still culturally constructed, are the internal perceptions that I will refer to throughout this thesis.

*Meritocratic ideals*

As previously discussed, Foucault argued that examinations enable people to be measured, judged, and compared based on their performance. With that in mind, I'd like to move slightly away from Foucault's theories to examine an influential social theory in American politics known as "natural aristocracy" or more commonly referred to as meritocracy. Foucault argued that tests are created as a mode of discipline, enacted to monitor and control people;

15

however, meritocracy argues that tests, in a way, create this power (or indicate who will be representative of this power). I'll explain further. Meritocracy dates back to the Jeffersonian era, when idealistic Americans believed that rule should depend on the best and the brightest (or the most virtuous and most talented) (Garrison 2009:12). Encouraged by the egalitarian sentiments of this movement, the idea that all individuals would be given the same chance to attain success by giving them all the same "test" and scoring it according to the same procedures served to reinforce the movement's strength and superiority above a traditional aristocracy (Garrison 2009:12). This idea remains a solid argument for the use of testing, supporting the idea that anyone can succeed in life based solely on their merit.

Critics of the movement, such as Carl Milofsky, make the argument that intelligence (as measured by intelligence tests) is not an adequate predictor for a person's job success.

> If we control for socioeconomic background and the number of years of education people have completed, actual intellectual ability and cognitive performance make little contribution to job status. School success, furthermore, is more strongly predicted by social class background and by deportment than by IQ scores. In this perspective, IQ is important mostly as a means of selecting those with middle-class attributes and justifying exclusion of others from opportunities to achieve high status (Milofsky 1989:1).

By following Milofsky's line of argument, the meritocracy, as developed by modern intelligence tests, is eerily similar to the aristocracy of the past, where class had more to do with the likelihood of success than true talent.

However, Shelley Goldman and Ray McDermott argue that schools, as a place of constant competition, contribute to this meritocratic social order. Students are bombarded with competitive activities intended to motivate and evaluate. Goldman and McDermott discuss the competition environment extending from informal classroom discussions to contests and finally to formal tests. "That there are winners and losers at the end of most school events is more than a

convenient happening in an institution that must eventually contribute its students to a stratified academic and social order" (Goldman and McDermott 1987:286). Goldman and McDermott's analysis hints at the idea that meritocratic ideals may underscore students' perception of testing events, in that a student's win or loss record may influence their perception of their ability to succeed in future competitive events and indirectly to life events. Though my framework will not be directly drawing from meritocratic ideals, Goldman and McDermott's study certainly brings up important ideas about students' perceptions that I explore further in my analysis.

*Transformative effect of tests*

I will also base aspects of my conceptual framework on Hanson's work on the examination. Hanson argued that "the two most important consequences of tests… [are] that they are mechanisms for defining or producing the concept of the person in contemporary society and that they maintain the person under surveillance and domination" (Hanson 1993:3). By creating a social system in which people must engage with tests in order to achieve their goals, they have become voluntary participants in this surveillance and domination, and as such tests are an excellent medium for conveying the society's rules and norms to the population (Hanson 1993:5). Tests can be considered as gatekeepers, restricting pathways and rewards only to those who have adequately passed through the gateway. For example, as previously mentioned, the SAT and ACT have become a standard requirement in order to gain entrance to a college or university in the United States. A person must adequately pass through the SAT/ACT gateway in order to continue down this pathway. "Because people covet the rewards that are available to those who pass through the gates guarded by tests, many spare no effort to remake themselves in ways that will improve their test performance" (Hanson 1993:293). It is this process-- the preparation and desire to both pass and improve performance on a test – that Hanson argues

results in transforming people. Tests assign "them to various categories (genius, slow learner, drug-free, etc.), where they are treated, act, and come to think of themselves according to the expectations associated with those categories" (Hanson 1993:294). This transformative effect and the categories that tests create will be important ideas throughout this thesis.

The transformative power of tests was also examined by Elana Shohamy, who argues that it results in negative social consequences.

> The power of tests, therefore originates in their ability to cause a change in behavior of those who are affected by them…The detrimental effects of tests cause those who are affected by them to take certain actions in order to maximize their scores. They gain the benefits associated with success on the test or avoid the consequences associated with failure of it by changing their behaviors in line with the demands of the tests (2001:105).

She points to the "social magic" that happens between the person who receives the last passing grade and the person who receives the first failing grade. By receiving a passing grade, the first person may be able to graduate from an elite institution, enjoying all the opportunities and advantages that are afforded to that graduation. However by receiving a failing grade (perhaps only a point difference), the second person will not graduate and thus will suffer exclusion from the opportunities afforded by graduating from the institution (Shohamy 2001:120).

The increase in testing in the United States has also shown signs of transformations across teachers and the educational structure itself. In their ethnographically based article, "Creating classroom cultures: One teacher, two lessons, and a high-stakes test," Valli and Chambliss worked to understand what happened when tests became the center of a classroom culture as opposed to the traditional child-centered culture. Comparing two reading classes by the same teacher, an intervention class geared toward improving the students' test scores and her regular reading class, they found that even as a well-seasoned teacher, there were significant differences between the teaching techniques used in the classes (2007).

In reading intervention, students were far more likely to spend their time simply listening to the teacher (32 percent vs. 13 percent) than in the reading lesson groups, in which the equivalent time (almost one-fifth of the class period) was filled with rich student talk, giving alternative or elaborated answers or explanations. Second, in the reading lesson groups Ms. Gabriel was far more likely to scaffold student learning by connecting class work to students' real-life context (23 percent vs. 5 percent of class time), perhaps one of the reasons why students were able to engage in dialogue rather than merely listen (Valli and Chambliss 2007:72).

The teaching differences between the two classes indicate that there is a much richer learning environment for children in the regular reading class and bring to light several concerns for test-centered classrooms. Valli and Chamberliss's study reveals how test-centered classrooms can result in changes in teaching styles. In this article, the instructor's teaching style for the intervention class was apparently transformed by the influence of the test. Many critics of the NCLB act consider these changes in teaching styles (towards "teaching-to-the-test"), which are largely attributed to the act's implementation, as a significant decrease in the overall educational value of instruction in today's schools (see Schaeffer N.d.).

From a slightly different perspective, Leila Christenbury, a college professor, provided an ethnographic account of her experience teaching a high school English class for a semester in *Retracing the Journey: Teaching and Learning in an American High School*. In this account, she reflected on her experiences with standardized examinations. There was an enormous emphasis on high-stakes testing at Christenbury's school; she was informed by the principal that she would have pretty much free reign with her students, provided that they passed their exams. "The major purpose of the semester's course was a single one: to prepare for the state test," Christenbury commented (2007:58). Students who performed well on the exams received special privileges and awards. Additionally, she noted that students seemed to understand that once these tests were over, all real school work would end, regardless of the fact that there were nine weeks remaining

in the school year (Christenbury 2007:94). From Christenbury's account, we can clearly see how tests have begun to transform students', teachers', and administrators' perceptions of the structure of the school year to one that revolves around the state examinations, as well as to indicate to students that success on examinations relates to privileges and freedom.

Another significant aspect of testing is anxiety. A study by Jerrel Cassady explored the interaction between test anxiety and test preparation and performance. Cassady found that students with high levels of test anxiety had relatively inferior test preparation skills when compared to the low anxiety student group (Cassady 2004). Furthermore, the high anxiety group's test performance was negatively impacted due, in part, to the heightened emotionality that "drew attention away from the test items" (Cassady 2004:586). Students who suffer from test anxiety have a negative perception of testing and may engage in self-handicapping behaviors. Cassady suggested that these students may be helped by developing test preparation skills and coping skills (Cassady 2004:587).

David Mechanic studied another aspect of test anxiety. He looked at how doctoral and master's degree candidates dealt with stress upon taking departmental written examinations that would qualify them for their degree. Mechanic interviewed both the students and faculty members over a four-month stretch to gain understanding about adaptive techniques students employed to circumnavigate the stressful circumstances of the examinations. His study found that communication and social comparison played a large part in these adaptive behaviors. During the study, Mechanic formulated a definition for examinations as the students perceived it:

> Examinations are defined as important by students since they represent a point of passage from the less prestigeful [*sic*] student status of precandidate to the more valued status of candidate. And the concern of the student experiences in going through the examination process often will depend on the perceived importance of this status shift for his future

life experiences and the degree to which he views his performance as reflecting upon his worth as a person (Mechanic 1978:20).

This definition is important because it illustrates the student's perception that examinations are a gateway that must be passed through in order to gain opportunities. Additionally, the student reflects upon his or her performance on the examination as a reflection of themselves. Naturally, this perception would induce a stressful response in students.

Stress may increase the positive transformative effect for test takers; however, there are cases in which stress may decrease this effect. For many students, stress and pressure encourages them to work to succeed; however, some students may take an opposite approach. Alfie Kohn discussed how students have been known to resort to "neatly filling in those ovals with [their] pencil in such a way that they made a picture of a Christmas tree…Even those test-takers who are not quite so creative may just guess wildly, fill in ovals randomly, or otherwise blow off the whole exercise, understandably regarding it as a waste of time" (2000:5). However, I would argue that young students engaging in this type of rebellious action may not fully understand the consequences of their actions. If the test holds significant influence on the person's life, e.g. a college entrance examination (assuming the student wanted to attend college), they would be unlikely to engage in this type of behavior and more likely to engage in behavior that would result in positive transformative results.

Moving away from test anxiety brings us to the final testing issue I will discuss in this literature review: testing misuse. Previously, assumptions were made about the transformative power of tests-- that students will identify with classifications such as "disabled," "slow-learner," "gifted," etc. This brings up an important issue regarding the possibility of mislabeling a child based on a testing mistake. Milofsky looked at this issue by researching 33 school psychologists

who were responsible for administering intelligence tests to children attending schools in and around Chicago (1989). His work raises awareness to some of the misuses of tests in urban schools. Milofsky's evidence demonstrates that inner-city (Chicago) intelligence testing was conducted under pressure from administration and that psychologists were not given sufficient time to test the children they were responsible for. The testing was hurried and ultimately was conducted irresponsibly. Conversely, outside of cities, he showed that test administration was child-centered and carefully managed (Milofsky 1989).

> Hurried testing, especially in cities where low-income and minority children are most likely to be considered for special class placement, seems to ensure that these children will receive anything but careful testing. Instead the limitations of blacks, Hispanics, and the poor are magnified. Because special education classes can stigmatize and generally offer a curriculum that is paced more slowly than the regular curriculum, labeling is dangerous to children (Milofsky 1989:175).

As Milofsky described, there are grave implications for an improperly conducted intelligence test. A student who is stigmatized by a "slow-learner" label may come to conceptualize him or herself according to this label, which may have significant consequences in the person's life. Therefore it is imperative that instructors and psychologists are careful to ensure tests are being conducted properly and analyses of their social consequences are vital.

These accounts show just how useful it is to explore testing as transformative. I will be similarly using the transformative effect of testing to help explain students' perceptions and behaviors following a testing event. First, I believe that the transformative effect provides an excellent explanation for why succeeding on tests is so important to students, and secondly, it provides the framework for understanding how a student might attempt to affect the outcome of a future test following a perceived failure by changing their study habits. In essence, after a

perceived failure, a student is compelled to put more effort toward transforming themselves than they had previously in an attempt to succeed the second time.

*Contingent events*

In addition to the transformative effect of tests, I also approach this study through a theoretical framework constructed by Caroline Bledsoe. Bledsoe's work inspired me to look at a student's educational and testing experiences collectively, as events that relate to and affect one another. For example, I am interested in how a student's self-concept might be formed depending on his or her cumulative testing experiences, and how these experiences guide a student's perception of their abilities, opportunities, and limitations. Though Bledsoe's area of expertise is in fertility and reproduction in sub-Saharan Africa, I feel that the theoretical framework she developed in her book, *Contingent Lives: Fertility, Time, and Aging in West Africa*, can be applied to many disciplines. Indeed, Bledsoe proposed that aspects of her theoretical framework did not apply only to non-Western cultures and should be utilized by Western scientists, anthropologists, and demographers. This is what I have attempted to do by extending her framework to testing.

Bledsoe's work on fertility and aging led her to construct a theory about how to frame the life course. The life course is a theoretical orientation in which one looks at the "social pathways of human lives, particularly in their historical time and place" (Elder, et al. 2003:4). Bledsoe conceptualized the life course based on contingent events, or as Anthony T. Carter astutely explained, "our lives – the lives of men as well as women and not just our reproductive lives – do not unfold as a simple response to the passage of time, but are contingent on unpredictable events and turnings" (2002:xii; see also Lock 1993:xxi).

Bledsoe explored fertility by attempting to understand the relationship between two fertility events, specifically in relation to reproductive mishaps (i.e. miscarriage, still-births, etc.). She was interested in how women responded to these mishaps and the techniques women used to ensure that their next reproductive event would be successful. I intend to look at a student's educational experience as a series of testing events and the inter-related experiences of those events. I am particularly interested in the relationship between testing events; if a testing "mishap" or "failure" occurs, how will this influence how students prepare for the next test? Will they change their study habits, increase the time between testing events, or seek additional help from teachers or peers, hoping for a more successful attempt next time (personal communication Rhine 2011)?

Bledsoe also makes a case for a contingent view of time and the cumulative effect that reproductive events had with respect to aging. In Western ideology, there is a very linear understanding of fertility: it is conceptualized as a biological clock that begins ticking at menarche and winds down to menopause. The foundational idea is that "aging [is what] puts an end to reproduction" (Bledsoe 2002:25). However, for the Gambian women in Bledsoe's study, fertility was not linear; in fact, they saw reproduction as "[causing] the body to age, a process that, in turn, precludes further reproduction" (Bledsoe 2002:25), and in this aging process, reproductive mishaps had a much greater toll on the body than successful reproductive events. By using this framework, Bledsoe views aging as contingent upon external events and hardships (Bledsoe 2002:322). The body does not age as a result of passing time; it ages because of events that happen within time. However, Bledsoe's theory does not fully remove its subjects from traditional time. Rather, she uses time as an "external orientation scheme" (Bledsoe 2002:29). This was due to the fact that the people she studied existed in the real world and were obliged to

act within that world contingent to basic temporal representations which were used to map that world (see also Gell 1992:218).

Though I am not attempting to look at the relationship between testing events and the aging process, I do feel that some of these ideas can be applied to my analysis. Primarily, the idea that the cumulative effect of these events has a significant impact on a student's life; as well as the concept of time that Bledsoe adopts. I will be using this concept of time, not to remove the student from linear time, but to look at the testing process from a different perspective.

The underlying framework for my analysis will be to look at this process from the perspective that students move through school by moving from one testing event to another, and not from the traditional perspective that they progress through grade levels (though this system is not going away, it is just being moved to the background). The traditional perspective is focused on the child's progress within and promotion from individual grade levels, which is facilitated through successful testing events. However, this perspective tends to focus on these testing events as being isolated within that grade level. But, by changing my perspective and bringing the tests to the foreground, it allows both the relationships between the testing events, and their cumulative effect to really become apparent. Throughout the following pages, I intend to apply anthropological theory such as Bledsoe's in order to strengthen understanding of the interaction between testing events and the life course.

METHODOLOGY

This project was undertaken in order to further the understanding of students' perspectives on testing. As such, I have developed the following research questions to direct my

study: How does the outcome of one examination event relate to the timing, preparation, and outcome of the next examination? How have examination events impacted students over the life course and/or their perception of opportunities available to them? In order to answer these research questions, I have conducted a qualitative research project, or more specifically an ethnographic study, utilizing semi-structured interviews and analyzing previous ethnographic research projects.

In approaching this project, I examined multiple studies which rely on upon quantitative research, as testing is frequently studied using this method. However, given that very little of the established research has extended to students' perspectives, qualitative research is a good starting point to investigate this topic. Ethnography provides a window into the students' perspective; it gives the students voice, and enriches quantitative data. "Qualitative description is a kind of measurement, an integral part of the complex whole that comprises scientific research. As sciences mature, they come inevitably to depend more and more on quantitative data and on quantitative tests of qualitatively described relations. But this never, ever lessens the need for or the importance of qualitative research in any science" (Bernard 2006:25).

Ethnographic studies may include several methods of data collection including "immersion in the site as a participant observer[,]…interviews, formal and informal, and the analysis of documents, records, and artifacts" (Merriam 2009:28). H. Russell Bernard describes combining research methods as the "front-edge" of researching techniques; in fact, by combining data, he states that they can "produce more insight than either [method] does alone" (Bernard 2006:385-386). This study primarily utilizes two methods of data collection: student interviews and document analysis. Additionally, information for this study was also collected through informal conversations with six teachers and several additional students as well as my own

knowledge and experiences with taking tests in the United States. Though this additional data is not directly referred to in my analysis below, it did inform my study and was consistent with my findings in the data.

I began collecting data for this project by analyzing previous ethnographic studies that I was able to locate throughout several months of library research. I used a purposive sampling technique to locate and analyze over 200 journal and newspaper articles and 50 books (see Bernard 2006:189-191). The search parameters I used to locate this sample included "educational testing and ethnography", "standardized testing and education", "teaching and ethnography", "students and testing", "No Child Left Behind", "educational policy and testing", "examinations and history", and "culture, education, and testing". This sampling allowed me to access a wide variety of information regarding education, testing, and students, and served as a basis from which I could build my study. From the initial sample, 21 books and 15 articles proved relevant information that was directly pertinent to the study. These documents were selected based on the quality of information, the document's relationship to the field of anthropology or education, and whether the document included ethnographic research. Information from these documents was either employed to provide background information or used as supporting data. I have chosen to include data from six ethnographic studies, including two narrative accounts, to support my analysis below. Though the authors have used the data from these ethnographic studies to answer different types of research questions, I feel that the data can also be used to answer my research questions.

In addition to these six ethnographic accounts, my data consists of confidential interviews with nine undergraduate (n=3) and graduate (n=6) students with a mean age of 28 years (ranging from 21 to 48). I felt that undergraduate and graduate students would provide an adequate sample

27

for this study, as this population should have recently taken a major standardized entrance

examination and should have significant current and past experience with various types of testing

events. I submitted an application to conduct these interviews to the Human Subjects Committee

at my university on 2/27/11 and it was approved on 3/9/11 (HSCL approval #1927).

I initially applied a convenience sampling technique to recruit students (see Merriam

2009:79). I made requests of several faculty members to email a request to their students.

Students were then able to directly contact me if they were interested in volunteering. However, I

found that this process did not result in an adequate number of students for the study and

subsequently recruited additional students through direct and chain referral techniques (see

Merriam 2009:79). Unfortunately, these techniques did not result in a varied sampling with

relation to ethnicic groups (n=8 interviewees self-identified as belonging to the white/caucasian

ethnic group), nor did it result in an equal representation of males and females interviewed (male

= 1, female = 8). However, due to the nature of the research questions, I feel that these

constraints in the sampling technique did not significantly impact the type of responses I

received from interviewees. Additionally, I have provided supplementary data from ethnographic

sources that allow for varying ethnic backgrounds to be represented in the data set. However,

future research, with a larger and more varied interview group, is suggested in order to

investigate any potential differences between genders, ethnicity, and socio-economic status

which this thesis may have missed due to these limitations.

The interviews lasted about 30 to 45 minutes each and took place at a convenient meeting

place for the interviewee; two interviews were conducted over the phone. I only met with each

student once. I used an oral consent procedure in order to maintain the informality of the

interview (see Appendix A for the complete oral consent procedure). Prior to beginning the

interview, I provided the student with a brief overview of the study, explained how the data I

collected from the interview might be used, and assured the student that his or her identity would

remain confidential.  I also let the student know that we could skip any questions that he or she

did not feel comfortable answering. Finally, I explained that an audio recording of the interview

would be used in order to allow the interview to be transcribed at a later date. I received an oral

confirmation that the student understood and consented to each of these conditions.

An interview guide was utilized to help initiate the interview (see Merriam 2009:102-

105). However, the interviews remained informal in nature and were directed by the

interviewee's responses. The following questions were likely to have been asked during the

course of the interviews (see Appendix B for the complete interview guide):

What do you think of when you think of standardized testing?
Can you tell me about the last major test you took?
Can you tell me about a time you did really well on a test?
Can you tell me about a time you did not do very well on a test?

In order to maintain students' confidentiality, I will be using pseudonyms to refer the

interviewees in this thesis. Additionally, the audio recordings have been kept in a password

protected file until the conclusion of the project, at which time they will be deleted.

I began to analyze the data immediately following my first interview. I transcribed this

first interview and looked for themes or categories with which to organize the data (see Merriam

2009:178). As I continued on with the interview process, I listened to the recordings of the

interviews for pieces of data that might fit into one of the themes and transcribed each of those

important pieces. I also listened for pieces that might create new themes or that might be outliers.

Following this process, I felt that the data should be organized into four main themes. I then

chose the quotations that I felt best represented the aspects for each theme and used this as my

supporting data for this paper. I also added supplemental data from my document analysis to help

support these findings. Finally, the data supporting each theme was then applied to my conceptual framework and I was able to make conclusions surrounding the data.

The data, analysis, and conclusion sections below have been organized in the following way. The data section (chapter two) is divided into four corresponding themes; within each theme, several ideas and students' perceptions are introduced. I have provided a brief analysis within these sections as to how these ideas may apply to my research questions. The analysis section (chapter three) combines all the ideas that have been previously introduced and applies them to my conceptual framework in an effort to answer my research questions. The conclusion section wraps up the ideas introduced in my analysis and concisely identifies my findings from this study.

I would also like to note that though I have interviewed nine students, I only chose the quotations which best represented the theme I was describing to be reprinted in my data analysis below. Therefore, all nine students will not necessarily be quoted in this thesis. However, overall, the interviews were consistent and each student was able to provide data which contributed to both developing my themes and my overall conclusions. My themes, analysis, and conclusions were formed based on a collaboration of evidence from my interviews, document analysis, informal conversations with students and teachers, as well as my own experiences and knowledge formed from my own participation in testing events throughout my life.

*Validity*

There were a few validity issues I needed to address prior to beginning this project. Primarily, I needed to be concerned with my own biases as a researcher and how these may have influenced how I conducted my initial sampling and document analysis, the interviews, and my final analysis.

My personal experiences with testing have helped direct my interest in the potential of tests to influence people's lives. During school, I always tested fairly well; however, due to a previously undiagnosed reading disorder, I was unable to test to my full potential. I felt that this disadvantage significantly affected several aspects of my life, including the type of college I was able to attend, the scholarships I qualified for, and my perception of my own learning capacity. These experiences fostered an interest in how standardized testing works, how the process can be made more unbiased, and how it affects students' lives. The ability to identify with other students' perceptions of standardized testing was one advantage of my personal connection to this study. However, the data may have been influenced by my preconceived notion that standardized testing has negative social consequences and may have affected my analysis.

In addition to these validity issues, as well as the gender and ethnic limitations of this study addressed above, I would like to recognize the other limitations of the study. Primarily, the small sample of interviews conducted and the difficulty I encountered with locating prior research on the subject. Given these, I intend for this study to reflect on the findings the data indicate and for these findings to illuminate areas for future research.

Upon reflecting on the study's limitations and validity issues, I have engaged in multiple validity tests to provide creditability to my study. First, I have ensured that my interview guide did not contain any leading questions. I included both positive and negative questions concerning testing in the interview and will include the corresponding responses in my data. Second, I looked for discrepant evidence and contradictions as I proceeded with my data analysis process. I have closely examined my conclusions and requested feedback from nine people to help prevent flaws due to my personal biases and assumptions (Maxwell 2005:112). Finally, I used a method Merriam describes as triangulation (2009:215; see also Maxwell 2005:112). By gathering data

from multiple sources of data: interviews, document analysis, informal conversations, and observations, I was able to verify and cross-check my data. Hopefully, by acknowledging my biases and working to understand how these may affect my inferences, I will be able to compensate for their influence on my study.

**CHAPTER 2 ~ THE EXAMINED STUDENT**

During the time I spent researching and interviewing students, I began to understand the data in terms of four trends or themes that were useful in understanding my research questions. The first two themes regard how students prepare for a future test, following both a perceived failure and a perceived success. The data from these themes help answer my first research question, how does the outcome of one examination event relate to the timing, preparation, and outcome of the next examination? The final two themes deal with a student's self-concept, external inputs, and future prospects following both a perceived failure and a perceived success on a testing event. The data from these themes illuminate my second research question, how have examination events impacted students over the life course and/or their perception of opportunities available to them?

I would like to begin by defining failure and success as I will continue to use these terms with respect to testing. Failure will refer to the student's perception of an unsuccessful result from a testing event. I would like to note that a perceived failure for one student may be receiving a "B" on a test and for another it may be receiving an "F". Failure as I use it in this thesis is in the eye of the beholder. Success, similarly will refer to the student's perception of a successful result in a testing event; again this will vary according to the student. Despite the variance in perception as to what qualifies as a testing failure or success, I have found that student responses to perceived failures and successes were quite similar and easily comparable across these variations. For example, a student's response to a perceived failure may include feelings of disappointment, that the score on the test is representative of them as a failure, and even that the test itself or the instructor's actions were influencing factors in that failure; in many cases these will motivate a student to take certain actions to attempt to rectify that failure in the

future. These types of responses held regardless of whether the perceived failure was a "B" grade on a test or an "F".

As I will continue to discuss below, I was very interested to find that students had a much easier time identifying perceived failures in their testing histories compared to successes. Every student I interviewed was able to tell me about at least one perceived failure; however, there were several students who had quite a bit of difficulty discussing perceived successes. This issue will be addressed further during my discussion of theme four: self-concept, external input, and future prospects following a testing success.

THEME 1: PREPARATION FOLLOWING A TESTING FAILURE

The first theme explored is how students prepare for subsequent tests following a perceived failure. Assuming that the student cared about doing well in the class or about their performance on the future test, every student interviewed indicated that altering their preparation approach to a future test was the most likely course of action following a testing failure. These approaches took on several forms including tutors, test-prep courses, working with peers, and spending additional time studying.

The following two interviewees provided excellent examples of the types strategies that students might choose to apply following a testing failure:

Kate: I did not do well [on the tests], at all…I met with the teacher, I met with the school's tutoring center, I called one of those little flyer things where you rip off the phone number and you're like, 'yes, I would like help in physics'…[but] I passed which was the most exciting thing of my life.

Jill: The GRE…I remember I took it twice, and so I spent…several months preparing [for the first time], and the second time I prepared for probably about a year… I

felt more prepared for it that second time around…because I had studied for it off and on for a year, and I had several friends who had taken the GRE around the same time, and so we sort of talked about our experiences and sort of that social aspect of having people to talk to about it…really helped as well.

As Kate and Jill explained, following a testing failure, students understood that something had to change in their preparation strategy in order for them to change the outcome of the next testing event. Kate met with the teacher and utilized tutoring services to help her prepare. Jill took a longer period of time to study prior to taking the GRE (Graduate Record Examination). She also mentioned a social aspect, which provided support and encouraged confidence. Both students employed human resources to aide in their preparation for future testing events. This is especially interesting when considering the individualization of testing events. That social interaction is seen as important in the preparation for testing events reflects how much social and cultural influences may impact these events.

However, Kate and Jill's experiences with transforming testing failures into testing successes were not universal among all the interviewees. One student, despite making several changes to her preparation strategies following a failed testing event, was unable to change the results of her next test. This failure resulted in a reversal of the additional preparation behavior, back to her previous behavior:

Cami:  Freshman year of college I took this biology test…I had studied the chapter forwards and backwards, with another guy from my freshman floor…this was the second test in the class and I hadn't done very well on the first test, so I made outlines of every chapter we covered, and…[I] knew the stuff that I thought was important for the test forwards and backwards…I got to the test and it was absolutely nothing like what I studied, which, from my perception was the important stuff…So [I'd] spent hours and hours for about two weeks before this test studying…and [the bad grade]…aggravated me to the point that I just didn't want to bother studying [for the other tests] because what was the point?…I got the same grade [on the other tests] studying like a maniac as I did just going to class and studying like a normal person.

As Cami described, although she altered her preparation approach, she was unsuccessful in changing the outcome of the next testing event. Her assessment of the situation was that it was not worth her time and effort to continue attempting to achieve a successful outcome on future tests because she did not believe that anything she did would be able to alter the outcome.

Conversely, another student, faced with a similar situation as Cami, took a very different approach. Following a perceived failure on a testing event, Barb discussed making changes to her study routines. These changes included adding a tutor and studying with a roommate:

> Barb: I knew the information forwards and backwards…but how the questions were worded on the test were so long and so complicated that it was really difficult to answer them…The words that were used and the syntax of the sentences was way above what I felt was necessary for the class…Once I'd failed that first test, I figured something's not working here, I'm not getting this…I meet with [my tutor] at least once a week, maybe twice and…we went over my notes,…the book,…he explained things over and over;…and then my roommate was also in the class with me, so…we would go over the information and…study together.

However, despite all of her additional work, Barb was never able to achieve a (personally) successful grade on any future examinations for the course. Nevertheless, unlike Cami, she kept up these study habits throughout the course. Interestingly, she expressed that despite these perceived failures on the examinations:

> Barb: I probably learned more from that class than any other class that I've taken at [my college], but I could not take those tests.

This is a particularly thought-provoking statement. If the purpose of a classroom test (an achievement tests) is supposed to demonstrate subject knowledge or a student's learning progress, then the test, at least in this instance, does not seem to be appropriate. If a student has put forth as much effort as Barb did to prepare for the examinations, will she still believe that the

failure is her fault, or might she come to believe, as was indicated in her quote above, that the failure extends to the test itself and, in effect, may even extend to the instructor?

I found other students shared similar feelings with regard to difficult tests. In my interview with Tess, she told me about a class where it was quite common for students to fail tests,

> Tess: This…class I took a couple of years ago, it's a pretty impossible class….the teacher just didn't care. He didn't care that 60 percent of the students failed his class and had to take it again.

Whereas Cami and Barb were more indirect in blaming the instructor, and more directly indicated that the test was at fault, Tess directly blamed her instructor as being responsible for the testing failures. Cami believed that the tests did not cover what she perceived to be the important material from the class. Succeeding on these tests was beyond her control and thus influenced her decision to alter her preparation approach. Barb, on the other hand, felt that the wording and structure of the tests were at fault, and that was her reasoning for why she was unable to gain a successful result on the test despite significant changes to her preparation approach. These three examples indicate that a student's preparation approaches are influenced internally by their perception of the tests themselves and their perception of the instructor's role in their success on the test.

As can be seen by the examples above, after a perceived failure, students made changes to their preparation behavior prior to the next examination in the hope to change the result of the next examination. In some cases, the student was successful in changing the result, and in others the student was not successful. The successful cases reveal the approaches students utilized in order to alter their preparation for testing events. These include additional studying sessions, seeking out a tutor, and working with peers. The successful cases also highlight the importance

of the social aspects involved in test preparation. In the unsuccessful cases, we saw two different responses; in the first case, the student went back to her previous study behavior, and in the second, the student continued on with her new study behavior despite continued failed attempts. These cases demonstrate to some extent the power of tests. For a student to concede defeat, he or she must believe that no matter what changes they make, there is no chance that they will be successful on the test. The second case demonstrates the transformative power of tests. This student continued to make changes, to attempt to succeed despite repeated failures. Even though the student was unsuccessful at the test, she still was an active participant in attempting to transform herself based on that test. However, in both cases, the students' perception of the test itself and their perception of the instructor were influential factors in their preparation approaches. In conclusion, these data are helpful in demonstrating how preparatory responses to failures in testing events relate to my research questions.

THEME 2: PREPARATION FOLLOWING A TESTING SUCCESS

The next theme I explored was how students responded following a successful testing event. This theme was much more difficult to extract based on the interviews I conducted. Interviewed students typically responded that following a perceived success, they would study like "normal". But what does "normal" mean? Based on evidence from two ethnographic studies of undergraduate student behaviors, I looked at the study patterns that successful testing events may result in. My data below will begin with foreign students' insights into testing in the United States, which will highlight two important aspects of testing. These aspects are then considered with respect to "cramming" and why this preparation behavior might seem advantageous to some

students. Next, I have utilized two additional ethnographic accounts to examine a situation in which a successful testing event may result in future failures. Finally, I will look at an example which explores the perceived finality of a successful testing event.

Rebekah Nathan, an Anthropology professor, spent a year posing as a freshman student at her university to understand some of the changes in students' attitudes towards their education. During the course of her study, she interviewed foreign students studying in the United States about their perceptions of tests. These interviews were very illuminating on this subject:

> Students here [in the US] have lots of exams, really small quizzes...You learn a little bit for the quiz, then you learn a little bit different for the next quiz. But people forget from week to week. Once the quiz is over, they forget…Really, I wonder at the end of the semester what people remember when they leave (Nathan 2005:79-80).

> I find it difficult to take the exams here seriously. You can go into a multiple-choice exam without studying really and still come out all right from things you remember from class, and a process of elimination. You could never go into an exam back home knowing nothing. They're essay and you start from a blank page; you wouldn't know what to write. Knowing almost nothing there, you'd get a 20 percent. Here you could pass the test (Nathan 2005:79-80)!

The first student's perception of testing events and regular quizzes was that they fragment the learning process; students learn enough to pass the test but then forget it immediately after. The second student hardly believed that studying was necessary to pass the tests she was exposed to. These quotes highlight two important aspects of testing in the United States. First, students are tested routinely, so often in fact, that the impact of individual tests is greatly reduced. Second, that many examinations do not necessarily require a significant amount of studying to be successful.

The idea that students are only doing enough work to pass a test leads me to consider the study phenomenon known as "cramming". Michael Moffatt spent ten years researching American undergraduate students. Employing participant observation, interviews, and student

39

essays, he attempted to reconstruct the undergraduate experience. During his research, Moffatt looked at students' studying styles. He found that the majority of students only minimally study on a regular basis and practice "cramming" prior to examinations. One student in Moffatt's study described how he used "cramming" as a studying style:

> As a general rule, as a I go through the daily course of events in class, I do the minimum amount of studying…Three to four days before an exam, I have some idea of what is going on in the class but by no means a full understanding of the material…It is during the few days before an exam that real learning takes place for me. I devote full time to studying for a specific exam to the exclusion of all other subjects (Moffatt 1989:294).

This student's explanation illustrates how a student, using a "cramming" studying style would have many peaks and valleys in their study routines. The student's daily study level would be at a minimal level, then a day or two prior to an examination, the study level would rise until after the examination, when it would resume its minimal level again until the next examination.

If a student continues to receive successful scores on their examinations, then we might assume that this external influence would affect the student's decision as to whether he or she should alter their study habits. If this were the only influence on the student's decision, it would make sense that the student would maintain this type of study behavior. Other influences might include extracurricular activities which may draw from the student's limited study time, and also would likely influence the student to maintain their type of behavior.

I have discussed two theories of intelligence, an entity theory and an incremental theory, as well as the idea that most Americans lean towards an entity theory. If as previously described, I view these psychological theories from the perspective that Americans have formed beliefs about intelligence, similar to those described in these theories, and as such, engage on behaviors which reflect these beliefs, than I can use these theories to understand the behaviors students exhibit in relation to intelligence.  For a student with an entity theory of intelligence, an

increased amount of effort expended indicates lower intelligence. Thus, a student would exert the minimal amount of effort possible to be successful on the examination; the "cramming" study model is a good fit for this perspective.

However, I should note that if a student had an incremental theory of intelligence, he or she would not be likely to follow this model. Given that students with an incremental theory of intelligence understand effort as a positive thing, they would perceive the expense of effort as using their intelligence. Additionally, a failure would be attributed to not exerting enough effort or strategizing poorly. For an incremental type of student, it would be more likely that he or she would engage in a more continual, regular study pattern, possibly increasing studies around examinations, but not to the degree that was described in the "cramming" scenario. Nevertheless, based on the previous findings that students are frequently tested and that tests may not require significant studying, the system in the United States does seem to reinforce "cramming" behavior, as long as students continue to be successful on tests while using this preparation approach.

Exploring a slightly different direction, Donna Deyhle conducted an ethnographic study of Navajo students to understand how "the idea and/or importance of a test develop among students" (Deyhle 1983:347-348). This study looked at how successful testing results may result in future failures. At the lower grade levels, Deyhle found that teachers attempted to make students more comfortable with testing events because they sensed that the Navajo students were somehow "different" (Deyhle 1983:359). As a result, teachers deemphasized the importance of tests and created a game-like atmosphere surrounding testing events in an attempt to protect the students from the harsh reality of what the tests really could mean for the students. "The teachers thought the younger children could be 'fooled' into believing that they had succeeded and were

41

doing well with the use of stars and tokens. Students, behind in grade level, moved through the lower grades experiencing the event of a test much as a game with an anticipated reward" (Deyhle 1983:360). By the time students reached the eighth grade, it was not uncommon for them to be as many as four grade levels behind (Deyhle 1983:350).

In second grade, Deyhle described how children responded to testing events with excitement due to their opportunities to receive "rewards" for doing a good job on these tests. "Tests were an opportunity, not a burden: the more frequently tests were given, the more chances a student had to obtain stars" (Deyhle 1983:366). The third grade atmosphere was not as game-like, and students began to feel a little anxiety over testing events. However, when it came time to take the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), on which students must attain a certain level in order to advance in grade level, there was little evidence that the students saw this test as any more important than any other test. However, by the fourth grade, students began to report high levels of anxiety when it came to testing events. Tests were much more serious than they had been in earlier grades, and students understood that failure meant they wouldn't be able to move to the next grade with their friends (Deyhle 1983:368).

The data from this study suggests that for these students, success on previous tests resulted in preparation techniques that were likely to result in future testing failures as the student progressed with his or her schooling. Deyhle theorized that in families whose parents and older children have been raised in a formal educational system, the concept and importance of a test would already have been incorporated into pre-school rearing of the child (Deyhle 1983:371-372). These children will likely have experienced "test-like" learning situations in their homes and have had the value of performance in school emphasized by their parents. However, for children who do not come from these types of families, either for cultural or economic reasons,

42

conceptual knowledge about tests will be absent prior to formal schooling. Under these circumstances, conveying the importance of testing events can be a very difficult task, and Deyhle believed that this explained the Navajo students' perceptions of testing events in her study. The teachers did not adequately communicate the importance of testing events to the younger students, and by the time these events became serious, the student "was already academically behind and felt frustrated and helpless when trying to 'catch up' and perform adequately on tests" (Deyhle 1983:373).

This example shows just how culturally significant tests are; especially for students whose background sets them at a disadvantage to understand the concept of a test or to be prepared to succeed in an environment heavily reliant on testing. In this case, being successful on a test can set a student up for failure if that success is grounded in an illusion, such as the "game-like" atmosphere that the teachers created.

In a final example, Leila Christenbury found that following the successful completion of a major testing event (the end of the year state examinations), students understood that their education was over – despite the nine weeks of school remaining. "An unintended consequence, however, was students' full understanding of the centrality of the tests and their truly logical unwillingness to continue working in any class after the tests had been given and scores publicized…students who knew the importance of the state tests knew that when the scores were in the bag, the teaching year was over" (Christenbury 2007:94). This statement demonstrates the finality of a successful testing event and the idea that once a student has attained a successful testing result there is nothing left to prepare for, and thus school and/or learning should cease.

I have examined evidence from these four ethnographic accounts relating to students' preparatory responses to successful testing results. The information from foreign students

studying in the United States indicated the extent to which US students are tested. Moreover, with a continuous bombardment of testing events, the impact of an individual testing event has been reduced. Information from interviews with the foreign students also suggests that many of these tests require little study time. This finding was connected to a study on undergraduate students' development of "cramming" study habits. The cultural impact of testing events was also examined.  For students who do not have preconceived concepts of tests prior to school, their early experiences with school may influence their ability to succeed in the future. For the Navajo children in Deyhle's study who did not have a concept of a testing event prior to entering school, their only experience came from the "game-like" atmosphere that was created by their early teachers. However, this concept did not adequately prepare the students for the seriousness of the testing events that they would experience as they got older and thus were likely to experience failures. Finally, I looked at the finality of successful testing event; for Christenbury's students, once the end of the year test was over, it indicated to the students that learning was over as well. In conclusion, these findings will serve to demonstrate how preparatory responses to successful testing relate to my research questions.

THEME 3: SELF-CONCEPT, EXTERNAL INPUT, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS FOLLOWING A TESTING FAILURE

This third theme that arose from my data represents the idea that following a failure on a testing event, a student experiences a corresponding shift in their self-concept. Similarly external inputs and future prospects reflect this shift as the student begins to conceptualize the impact of a testing failure.

I would like to set the tone for this theme by recounting two interviews that Peter Sacks prepared while writing his book, *Standardized Minds: The High Price of America's Testing Culture and What We Can Do To Change It*. The first interview is of a young girl, Kelly Santos, and her mother, Mary Santos, about Kelly's experience with testing failure on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Her experience illuminates how a testing failure can result in a negative self-concept and reduced future prospects. In the second interview, Sacks uncovers a very different story, that of Gilbert Mederios, who was able to turn a testing failure into a success.

As a bit of background information to Kelly's story, Texas began its educational reform movement in 1983, spearheaded by Ross Perot and the Select Committee on Education. They recommended the adoption of a testing system, the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills or TABS. This new system would simultaneously ensure that teachers were doing their jobs and that students across the state were getting an adequate education (Sacks 1999:108). The TABS led to the implementation of the TAAS in 1990. The TAAS shifted focus from minimum competency to testing "higher-order thinking skills and problem solving abilities" (Sacks 1999:108). Since the adoption of TAAS, testing has become extremely influential to education in Texas. Students are required to pass TAAS exams to progress to the next grade from third through ninth grades; additionally students must pass a final exit TAAS exam in order to receive a high school diploma.

Kelly's mother, Mary Santos, was originally from Butte, Montana, and moved with her family to San Antonio, Texas when she was eighteen so her parents could be closer to family members living in Mexico. Mary became a teacher and worked hard to give Kelly "the advantages of good schools and a secure, middle-class life" (Sacks 1999:107). As a young girl,

Kelly had enjoyed school and was an A and B student. "In middle school," she remarked, "I enjoyed science and learned a lot in that class. I didn't like history at all, math at the time was OK, English was good, and band and P.E. were fun" (Sacks 1999:107). In high school, Kelly was a confident young girl, well liked among her classmates and teachers, and involved in the swim team.

Kelly took her "exit exam" TAAS for the first time when she was in the tenth grade, as is common for all high school students in Texas. In order to pass, Kelly needed to attain a score of at least 70 on each subtest in reading, writing, and mathematics (Sacks 1999:106). Kelly didn't have a problem with the reading and writing sections, but when it came to the mathematics, she missed a passing score by just a couple of points.

Kelly began retaking the TAAS, each time hoping to pass the math section, and each time being dissapointed by a mere point or two. Mary started seeing the effects these repeated failures had on her daughter. Though Kelly had always earned decent grades, even those started to suffer when she started failing the TAAS. After all, Kelly now believed she was a failure, and her TAAS scores proved it. "I could see a change in her. She didn't care about herself anymore," Mary said.

> Until she started repeatedly taking the math part she did well in school. Then her senior year everything came tumbling down. Failing became a self-fulfilling prophesy. Kelly has the stigma of failure. She says to me, "I'm stupid, I can't do it…I can't even graduate. I can't even walk the stage with my friends. I will never be able to say, 'I graduated.'" Her senior year was like a nightmare. Her self-image was destroyed. Peer pressure is tremendous with these students. They ostracize each other, and not just over clothing and fashion, but also over standardized test scores (Sacks 1999:115).

Mary did everything she could to help her daughter, attempting to inspire her with stories of her own personal struggles with testing. She hired tutors and had Kelly tested for dyslexia, all to no avail. A week before Kelly's graduation, she received the news that she had failed to pass the

mathematics section of the TAAS exam for the sixth time and would not be able to graduate with her high school class (Sacks 1999:115-116).

By the following spring, three more unsuccessful attempts had led Kelly to the "Texas Education Agency's Region 20 service center, where thousands of San Antonio kids, like Kelly, go to retake the TAAS exam – one, two, even five years or more after they were supposed to graduate" (Sacks 1999:106). Kelly's dream was to go to college to study law enforcement, but she's been working part time as a lifeguard and a hostess. The General Educational Development (GED) exam might be Kelly's last hope for a high school diploma (Sacks 1999:116). "I worry that I won't make it in life, that I won't go to college, that I'll be stuck in a dead-end job and I won't become the cop I want to be," Kelly said. "Sometimes, I feel like the dumbest person around because I can't pass this test. It has taken a lot out of me emotionally and mentally...This has not been fun, it has been hell for me. It has made me feel that if I'm not smart enough to pass an eighth-grade test, then what is the point of me going to college? I wish I never had to worry about this test, but it is always there" (Sacks 1999:116).

Kelly's story clearly reveals the damage a testing failure can inflict on a person's self-concept and future prospects. Kelly's testing failures resulted in a decrease in self-worth; she believed that she was a failure, that she was dumb, and that she would never succeed in life. These ideas stemmed from her TAAS results and increased with every failed attempt that she made. Peer pressure was yet another influencing factor to her self-concept. She was judged by her peers based on her inability to pass. This was exacerbated by her inability to graduate from high school with her peers, making a public spectacle of Kelly's failure. Finally, Kelly's future prospects were grim. She had dreams of going to college and becoming a cop; however the reality of the limitations which resulted from failing the TAAS made a significant impact on

these dreams. Kelly feared that she wouldn't be able to attain her dreams and she would be stuck in a dead-end job with no future.

However, there are exceptions to Kelly's experience. For some people, a testing failure may not result in a change in self-concept and may even increase future prospects. Peter Sacks found an example of this exception when he tracked down a retired teacher, Chuck Lavaroni and a student he'd taught forty years earlier, Gilbert (Gil) Mederios.

Lavaroni was Gil's seventh grade teacher, and during the course of that seventh grade year, there was an important standardized test that was administered to all the students. Gil's performance on the test "hadn't been promising for [his] academic future" (Sacks 1999:95). In the 1950's and 1960's, students were often "informed by teachers and social counselors that, on the basis of test scores, that they weren't 'college material'" (Sacks 1999:97). As a strong believer in the power of standardized tests, Lavaroni felt that he needed to break the news to Gil; however, he liked and respected the boy and wanted to be careful not to hurt him. "One day at school, Lavaroni took Gil aside and broke the news about the test result. 'Gilbert, it's important for you to know that you should not have as one of your goals going to college,' Lavaroni told him. 'These tests show you...,' his voice trailed off. 'You're a wonderful human being, but the tests don't show it. You should stay in the trucking business with your dad'" (Sacks 1999:95-96).

In a chance encounter, thirty years later, Lavaroni ran into a now adult Gil, and they were able to catch up. Gil had graduated from the University of San Francisco and went on to earn his law degree. Since then, "he had owned and run five different companies, including Vita-Stat, the company that makes the ubiquitous blood pressure monitors in drugstores nationwide" (Sacks 1999:96). Following this meeting, Lavaroni expressed how horribly embarrassed he was at

believing so strongly in the usefulness of the testing results and for placing Gil in the position that he had.

Sacks tracked down Gil Medeiros to understand his side of the story. Even thirty years later, [Gil] had "more than a vague recollection" of the conversation with his seventh-grade teacher. Medeiros recalled his great respect for Lavaroni as a teacher but also the anger he felt at the time, when his future could have been defined by a test score. "He [Lavaroni] basically told me not to go to college, that I'd be wasting my time; because of my test scores I'd have a difficult time in college," Medeiros told Sacks. "I told him, 'You don't know what you're talking about.' I do remember being told that, being offended by it and thinking I don't care about their stupid goddamned test. Whatever the test was it was not related to myself and what I could do" (Sacks 1999:96).

Gil's father had instilled strong values in him from a young age. "My father basically said to me, 'you do your best at whatever you do. You are known by what you do.' That's how I grew up, judging people by their actions. It's what you *do* that matters, and that's what still matters to me" (Sacks 1999:96). However, these values were challenged by standardized testing. "That was my first run-in with that type of environment, where people are judging you on other norms, in this case a test, that you can be judged on a test alone," he told Sacks. "That value ran against what I was taught, and so I have resented testing all my life. I know what I can do" (Sacks 1999:96).

Gil's story reveals that a person's self-concept and future prospects do not necessarily have to be directed by the construction of norms on examinations. For Gil, the failure on the test was a rejection of that aspect of societal influence on his future. Gil's father taught him values that helped Gil go against the grain and to succeed despite what the test results said. It is very

difficult to go against society's norms and to succeed despite the barriers tests represent, especially when you add implications such as gender, class, ethnicity which certainly influenced both Gil and Kelly's ability to succeed on these testing events. However, I found in my own interviews that when faced with testing failures, the students I interviewed did persevere, primarily by changing the course of their goals; though these students were not going against norms, they were working within them. Thus, I believe that the students I interviewed fall somewhere in-between Kelly and Gil, both experiencing the outcomes of their testing failures and yet being able to successfully move beyond them.

On this note, I would like to move into the results from the interviews. I found that without exception, every student I interviewed was able to identify a perceived failure on a testing event. In one interview, a student discussed an insightful understanding of a how a test-taker might identify with their score:

> Cora: When people fail to pass, it seems that other people think it's their fault, it is either that they didn't study hard enough, or that they are not smart enough, [or] that they are not able enough to pass that exam. I wish there was a better way of grading, and I understand the appeal of that style [of testing], but I really like when you emphasize other things as well, it's like when you see an individual as more than just a number…like that's it, you are a 1300 on your SAT, that's who you are, that's…what you are.

Cora makes two important points. First, she relates a testing failure to a direct failure on the part of the person. This reflects the idea that external perceptions of testing events can influence one's self-perception. Second, she discusses the idea that as a test-taker, the person becomes nothing more than a score. This idea reinforces the self-perception concept, that a person understands him or herself based on their performance on a test, and the numerical result of that test becomes a numerical representation of them as a person.

During other interviews, I encountered student perceptions that testing failures reflected back on the student as a person. One example of this was in my interview with Jane. We were discussing her experience taking the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT):

> Jane: That was a pretty bad test…I studied on my own for it, I got a book and I studied lots of hours on my own for it…I did awful on it…afterwards...I pretty well knew I did not do well on it, and so it definitely caused me a lot of anxiety…and I mean just huge disappointment…I felt like such a failure after it, it definitely put me towards in the direction of becoming a nurse and it crossed the doctor thing off my list…'cause I wasn't willing to sit for it again…and it definitely put me in the right direction, and I'm really, really happy with where I'm at, but that was… a pretty monumental standardized test in my life.

Jane discussed feeling disappointment and self-identifying as a failure following her poor performance on the MCAT. However, unlike Kelly, Jane decided to direct her life in a different direction. She chose to not retake the MCAT after failing the test, and therefore this failure self-concept was compartmentalized to the single event, it did not begin to define Jane as a person as it had Kelly. Jane was able to move on, expressing happiness in her current life course and even credits that happiness and change in direction to the MCAT testing event.

In another interview, a second student demonstrated a similar coping response to yet another perceived failure on the MCAT:

> Cami: Well I guess the second time I took the MCAT I didn't do as well as I had hoped, and so I had applied to med school beforehand with a certain score and then I got the same score when I retook the MCAT, and so…that kind of led to my decision to switch career tracks because I figured it wouldn't have increased my odds of getting into med school.

The course of life that both Cami and Jane took as a result of the MCAT failures is very interesting. These testing failures are significant in that they revealed limitations beyond which these students could not progress. Neither Cami nor Jane was able to continue onto medical school without a successful MCAT test result; thus, their MCAT score limited these students'

future prospects. Both students adjusted their career tracks based on these results, and no longer are pursuing doctor of medicine degrees. This is a powerful finding; that the result of one test can directly influence a student's life course.

In looking at self-concept, external input, and future prospects following testing failures, I have discovered the following: first, as demonstrated by Kelly's story, testing failures can significantly influence a person's self-concept. Kelly began to identify as a failure following the TAAS examination; this concept was intensified due to peer pressure and her inability to attain her dream of going to college. Conversely, Gil's story revealed a student who went against society's norms, succeeding in life regardless of a testing failure. My interviewees' responses seemed to fit somewhere in-between Kelly and Gil's stories. Jane self-identified with the testing failure, but she didn't allow this to define her as a person; instead she altered her career path. Finally, an interview with Cora illuminated the idea that test-takers may directly identify or gain self-concept from the numerical representation of that test. In conclusion, these data are useful in demonstrating how self-concept, external inputs, and future prospects following a testing failure may relate to my research questions.

THEME 4: SELF-CONCEPT, EXTERNAL INPUT, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS
FOLLOWING A TESTING SUCCESS

The final theme I explored was based on a successful testing event. I wanted to know how a student's self-concept might be affected, how external inputs might influence this self-concept and additionally how future prospects are influenced by this success. Previously, I mentioned that interviewees seemed to have a difficult time discussing perceived successes; in fact, one student was unable to come up with a perceived testing success at all. However, it

52

seems highly unlikely that students who had at least successfully completed grade school, high

school, and some college would never have had a successful testing experience. One explanation

for this phenomenon may be that these students' perception of success was that, regardless of

how successful the testing event, there is almost always a perceived room for improvement.

Thus, the student may view the test as a failure unless there are very strong external inputs to

override this understanding. Another explanation can be drawn from evidence presented in the

second theme. This evidence was that students in the United States are tested very frequently,

and the bombardment of these tests reduces the overall impact of the individual test. Therefore,

though students I interviewed may have been successful on many of these minor tests, the

negligible impact of the success perhaps did not warrant discussion during our interview.

Almost every student that was able to describe a successful testing event during our

interview described a very significant test in their lives. These tests included nursing boards, the

ACT, and the GRE. In each case, the student's success on the examination resulted in significant

opportunities being open to him or her and very strong positive external inputs. The following

quotes from Levi's and Jill's interviews illustrate the impact that the ACT and the GRE had on

each of their lives:

> Levi:  I scored...[at] the cutoff [on the ACT] which allowed me to be involved in an
> honors program at the university that I attended…It allowed me to finish an
> honors project as an undergrad. It allowed for some scholarship opportunities and
> really helped open the door for some bigger things that wouldn't have been
> available had I scored one point lower.

> Jill:  For me and my expectations of myself, I did really well, and I was really excited,
> and I remember calling everybody I knew, 'Ah I did so much better on the GRE
> this time!'…I was very pleased with myself I knew that I had done everything
> that I had needed to do to prepare and that it was successful. I knew the cutoff
> points for schools, for a lot of them that you had to get 600 on each part of the
> GRE. So that I knew that I had at least made that cutoff score, which was really

nice because I knew that there were a lot of schools that if I didn't do very well on the GRE, that that would automatically shut a lot of doors for me. That there would be a lot of schools that wouldn't admit me because of that…So that was just really exciting that I had all these options now, that I could actually apply to those places.

For Levi, his score on the ACT allowed him access to additional educational programs and scholarships, and Jill's score on the GRE enabled her to apply to the schools she wanted to. The impact of these types of opportunities was what resulted in the students' perceptions of these testing events as successful. It took this impact to make the difference between a perceived failure and a perceived success.

One student made a particularly insightful comment in relation to testing failures and successes that may shed some additional light on this issue:

Cora:   I think when you do well, people make it as it reflects on them, and when you do poorly people make it reflect on you; kind 'a like you are not doing enough or you are not learning enough, or you're embarrassing yourself. But when you do well it reflects on them. It's like 'oh look at how smart my kid is' or 'look at how good of a professor I am'…That's how I felt at least, like when…friends of mind did poorly, the teachers didn't act like it was their fault, it was the student's fault.

As Cora described, a failure on a testing event is externally perceived as a reflection of the individual's failures or faults, whereas a success on a testing event is reflected as a shared experience. It is not only the student who was seen as successful; it was also the parents and the teachers who were successful. This comment reflects the external significance of testing failures and successes. A successful student reflects everyone who helped him or her to achieve the success, it is a representation of the student's social network; however, a failure only reflects the individual.

I previously discussed self-concept formation quite a bit with regards to perceived failures. Though this was not as easy to uncover with regards to success, one interview in

54

particular did illustrate how a student may internally form aspects of her self-concept depending on test results:

> Cami: When I took the ACT the second time…I did really well on it, and I got really excited when I got my scores 'cause I was dancing around saying 'I'm smarter than my brother'; 'cause he's like the smart one, and I beat him on the scores.

This reflects a change in Cami's self-perception as being smarter than her brother. Prior to receiving her ACT scores, she believed that her brother's intelligence was superior to her own, but after having out-scored him on this test, her perception changed. The test scores allowed Cami to compare her results with that of her brother and by ranking the scores, she came to the conclusion that she was smarter than her brother; thus, Cami's overall self-perception was altered.

Curiously, Cami's comments oppose Cora's insight that a successful testing event is perceived as a representation of the individual's social network. Instead, Cami understood her success in terms of her own abilities, as being something that she alone was responsible for achieving. This brings up an interesting contradiction to the previously discussed external perspective of who is responsible for a testing success or failure. Perhaps, for the individual, it is the opposite. From the individual test-taker's perspective, a successful testing event is a reflection of the test taker's abilities and conversely, a testing failure is a reflection of an external problem (i.e. the test, the instructor, etc.) (personal communication Hanson 2011). This idea is further supported by evidence from Tess, Cami, and Barb's perceptions of their testing failures from theme one as resulting from either a poorly constructed test or an ineffective instructor.

By looking at successful testing events in terms of its influences on students' self-concept, external inputs, and future prospects, we have learned three things. First, student perceptions of successful testing events seem to be rare and are primarily influenced by

55

significant external inputs resulting from the success. These inputs include future opportunities (e.g. acceptance to a school, scholarships, etc.) and must be significant enough that the student understands their performance on the test as moving them forward in life and thus perceives it as a success. Second, as one interviewee suggested, the external perception of a testing failure is a reflection of the individual's faults, whereas a testing success was a reflection of the student's social network: the parents, the teacher's, etc. Third, it was also observed that the student's internal perception may be the opposite: a testing failure is a reflection of external influences where as a testing success is a reflection of the individual. Finally, students may form self-concepts based on successful test results; it is likely that these concepts will be directly related to the tested abilities (e.g. intelligence). In conclusion, these data are helpful in demonstrating how self-concept, external inputs, and future prospects following a successful testing event relate to my research questions.

**CHAPTER 3 ~ THE EXAMINED LIFE**

Based on the data I have collected, I believe that I have sufficient evidence to begin answering my two research questions: how does the outcome of one examination event relate to the timing, preparation, and outcome of the next examination and how have examination events impacted students over the life course and/or their perception of opportunities available to them? This analysis will review the conceptual framework and will pull specific examples from the data to support my ideas. Throughout the following analysis, I will be developing three major ideas. First, there are relationships between testing events; it is possible to examine these relationships by refocusing our perspective as to how these events relate to each other within time. Second, tests are transformative, and both internal and external perceptions of the event influence these transformations. Finally, by looking at a student's cumulative testing experiences, I will show how these influence the student's perception of their opportunities across the life course.

QUESTION #1

The first two themes explored how students prepare for a future test following a perceived failure, and how students prepare for a future test following a perceived success. As discussed, my theoretical framework was built on theories from three major sources: Foucault, Hanson, and Bledsoe. Foucault's work provides a foundation for why a student would be driven to succeed on a testing event. The examination individualizes the student. It allows him or her to be judged against a set of pre-determined norms, to be compared and categorized against his or her peers. Additionally, Hanson discussed the rewards that examinations guard, and that people are willing to transform themselves in various ways, hoping to improve their chances of success

on the examinations and to gain access to those rewards. Thus, the student is both compelled to perform well on examinations and to make any necessary changes or transformations in order to achieve success. This idea helps to explain why a student would change their preparation strategy following a testing failure.

Evidence for these theoretical ideas can be found in the data. Barb, for example, spent enormous amounts of time and energy attempting to transform herself in her attempts to successfully complete her tests. Based on Hanson's framework, one of the reasons Barb engaged in these transformations was to gain access to the rewards offered to those who were successful. It is interesting to note that these rewards were not necessarily learning, because as Barb said, she had learned the information quite well during this transformation process. Rather, these rewards were opportunities, recognition, and promotion, and the test was their gatekeeper.

Bledsoe's work was what inspired me to look at tests from this question's perspective, to look at the relationship between testing events, especially testing failures, and to try to understand how they influenced the student's preparation approach for the next examination. My previous discussions regarding meritocracy and the transformative effect of tests, demonstrate the perceived importance for individuals to perform well on tests to maintain a self-concept of high intelligence, an external appearance of high intelligence, and to reap the rewards given to those successful on tests. My initial assumptions regarding how students might alter their approaches were that the students might change their study habits or to seek additional help from their teacher or peers in an attempt to improve their results on the next examination.

Bledsoe's framework also included a time aspect, and I used some of these ideas to frame my analysis of this question. Linear time (or traditional time) was moved to the background in order to bring the testing events and the relationship between these events to the foreground.

From this perspective, our focus on time has been altered; it is now a focus on how events relate to each other within time instead of looking at events simply passing through time. Using this framework, I can begin to analyze how testing events relate to one another.

My framework looks at how a student progresses from testing event to testing event as opposed to grade to grade. Christenbury's example helps explain this change in perspective with relation to time. She discussed how the school year not only built up to the state examination, but once it was over, the students understood that their learning for the school year was complete (despite the nine weeks remaining in the school year). Essentially, the students understood the school year as revolving around this test, and once it was completed, there was no need to learn anything more until it was time to start preparing for the next test (during the next school year). This perspective on time can also be applied to individual subjects: learning revolves around the build-up to the "chapter test", and following that test, progresses on to the next chapter which again builds up to a test. I am using this concept to view the student experience as a relationship between these tests, and the cumulative student experience as a progression from testing event to testing event.

To answer my research question more directly: examination events are not solitary events and one examination event can affect the outcome of another examination. From an early age, students begin to form strategies about to how to prepare for a test. If a student's concept of an examination is founded on the goal to be successful, then following a successful examination, a student will likely feel that their preparation strategy is sufficient and will not make any changes prior to their next examination. Additionally, as Christenbury's account illustrated, the successful completion of an examination represents finality, a completion of the material, school year, etc. If success is representative of an end in the student's mind, than by achieving a successful

completion, they would not feel the need to extend any work or preparation strategies beyond that end. There would be no perceived need for additional improvement and/or learning.

However a failed examination would not represent finality, it would represent a need for improvement, a need to continue on. Following a failed examination, a student may feel the need to re-strategize his or her preparatory approach. Three scenarios regarding failed examinations were looked at. In the first scenario, two student examples (Kate's experience with physics examinations and Jill's experience with the GRE) were given in order to demonstrate the ways students can achieve successful transformations between testing events. The strategies that students used to alter their preparation approaches included taking additional time to prepare and utilizing additional resources at the student's disposal. Some of the major resources that students indicated were within their social network – parents, teachers, tutors, and peers. Based on this evidence, I would conjecture that a student with a strong social network would be at an advantage during this preparation process. In the second scenario, Cami was not successful at transforming herself following a testing failure. Her assessment of the situation was that it was not worthwhile to continue on with her altered preparation approach and she reverted back to her previous behavior. In the final scenario, Barb actively attempted to transform herself despite her ability to attain a successful result based on her altered preparation strategy. This example demonstrates the full power of one test over another. Despite the failed outcome, Barb continued to work just as hard; the drive for success was so great that she was willing to put forth an enormous amount of effort, even though she continued to be unsuccessful.

It is interesting that students would be so reliant on the strength of a social network in order construct testing successes. This is especially thought-provoking in relation to such an individualized institution as examinations. The idea that a student reaches out to his or her social

network in order remedy a testing failure indicates that testing may not be as true of a reflection of the individual as it is intended to be. This goes back to Hanson's argument that tests create that which they intend to measure. If intelligence and the categories that define an individual's level of intelligence are indeed created by the test, then it makes sense that students must go to those who have successfully passed these tests and who can impart the knowledge and abilities needed to succeed. This idea challenges the psychological perspective that intelligence is at least partially biological or fixed. In this case it is the student's background and their access to people who have the knowledge and abilities to teach them about how to take tests that influences their ability to succeed.

By asserting the parameters that examinations transform the individual, that there are relationships between examination events, and by refocusing my perspective as to how these events relate to each other within time, I have explored the following ideas. Successful outcomes are not likely to result in any significant changes in a student's preparatory approach, whereas failed outcomes are very likely to result in significant changes in a student's preparatory approach. These testing failures result in both successful and unsuccessful outcomes on future testing events. Moreover, students are likely to reach out to human resources following a perceived failure, as these were perceived to be the best resources to help a student succeed on future testing events given that tests create that which they are measuring.

QUESTION #2

My second research question was explored in the last two themes: a student's self-concept, external inputs, and future prospects following a perceived failure on a testing event and following a perceived success on a testing event. In answering my first question, I discussed

Hanson's theory that tests are transformative. That because people covet the rewards and to belong to the bounded categories that can be obtained through examinations, they will make every effort to transforming themselves in order to be successful on those examinations. A successful test result may mean improved self-esteem, promotion to the next grade level, additional opportunities, scholarships, etc. However, a failed test result has a much darker outcome and may mean decreased self-esteem, lost opportunities, limitations to future opportunities, retention in grade level, etc.

There were several examples of this from the data. Levi and Jill were two examples of successful transformations. Levi's success on the ACT meant that he had access to additional opportunities including scholarships. Likewise, Jill's success on the GRE meant that she had access to schools that would not have been available to her otherwise. However, the testing failures that were addressed as well as their consequences were even clearer examples of the transformative power of test. Kelly's story was an example of how a test can completely transform a person's life. Prior to taking the TAAS, Kelly was a bright girl with goals and aspirations. However, failing that exam began to transform her perception of her ability to achieve these goals, and her continued failures solidified these changes. Kelly's failures meant that she was unable to graduate from high school or to attend college. These events changed her entire perspective on life, her options, and even her self-worth. She began self-identifying with the failure. Kelly's transformation demonstrates just how powerfully negative this transformative effect can be.

However, from here the data begin to move us slightly away from the established theoretical framework and I can begin to develop my own twist. The framework I previously described was based on several theories, one of which was Foucault's theory that the individual

case is formed subject to outside judgments. I previously made a distinction between Foucault's theory and my own, in that the individual is capable of forming a self-concept, or an internal perception of their performance on an examination, and that it is not the sole result of external influences. I do acknowledge that the individual's understanding of testing, its meanings, and influences are formed through the individual's knowledge of social and cultural norms, which are external, and the individual uses this knowledge to form these internal judgments. However, I intend to show that both the external and the internal influences on these self-concepts are important to the decisions a student makes about their life course.

Jane and Cami's stories are good examples of this from the data. Both students made transformations built on internalized self-concepts. Jane and Cami had unsuccessful results on the MCAT. Externally, they were now limited in their career options, and Jane even self-identified with this failure for a short time. However, these students did not let this failure take over their lives. Instead, the failure allowed them to transform their own lives, to make internal decisions within the limits imposed by external influences, and they both chose to pursue a different career path.

Previously, I discussed the test as a gatekeeper; this notion relies on external influences. In Jane and Cami's cases, they used their failures as a guide, making an internal decision to persevere despite this limitation. The important difference between these cases and my previous gatekeeper example (i.e. Barb's desire to gain access to the opportunities, recognition, and promotion available through and constructed by testing events), was that instead of the test directly transforming these individuals' lives, which would mean that external forces were influencing this transformation, these individuals used these failures to transform themselves.

63

These examples demonstrate how both external and internal influences are important to the decisions students make about their future.

Bledsoe's work inspired me to look at a student's cumulative testing experience and how past experiences build to form an overall perception of the student's abilities and opportunities in life. Additionally, by bringing the student's testing experiences to the forefront, and examining their relationships as I did in the previous question, we are able to observe how these events collectively influence the student's life course.

Examples of these types of experiences can be clearly seen in the data. Kelly, for example, perceived that her future was limited by her testing failures. She also formed a concept of her math abilities based on these test scores. Similarly, Cami and Jane's future opportunities were limited by their MCAT results. From the other perspective, Levi and Jill were able to form positive perspectives of their futures. Levi's opportunities were broadened given his successful ACT score, allowing him access to scholarships. Likewise, Jill now had the opportunity to attend many graduate schools that were only available to her because of her GRE score.

It is interesting to look at these opportunities and restrictions in line with Hanson's argument. From this perspective, the test itself is responsible for creating these categories and opportunities that students strive to attain (Hanson 2011). In Cami and Jane's example, the category of a potential candidate for medical school was itself created and bounded by the MCAT. Had these students been successful on the MCAT, they would belong to this category. Having been unsuccessful on the test, they sought out other categories to which they were not limited by their MCAT results. Cami and Jane both chose to enter nursing school, however to belong to this category, again they were required to pass another examination such as the NET (Nursing Entrance Test), or the TEAS (Test of Essential Academic Skills). In order to pass

**examinations students will attempt transform themselves so that they appropriately fit into these bounded categories.**

My data show that examination events and the transformation process students endure to pass examinations do influence students over the life course and have a significant impact on their perception of opportunities available to them. Failures on testing events result in a self-concept shift built on that failure or a combination of multiple failures. These concept shifts are reflective of the student's understanding that they do not fit into the bounded categories created by the test. From the interviews, students were more likely to discuss internal influences, i.e. that they "felt like a failure". The suggestion that a testing failure is the reflection of the individual's faults reveals some of the social influences that are supporting these students' understanding of the relationship between testing failure and failure as a person. However, though these external influences may affect the student's self-concept, the opposite idea that, internally, the student may also perceive a failure as a problem with the test itself or with the instructor, indicates that there is a combined influence of internal and external factors on the student's self-concept. Externally, students' opportunities were directly limited by testing failures, and in the example of Kelly's story also included public humiliation and shame.

As I have discussed, perceived failures on testing events result in a self-concept shift, and similarly, successful testing events also resulted in a self-concept shift. Successes were celebrated externally; for example, students' opportunities (i.e. scholarships, entrance to schools, as in the cases of Levi and Jill) were expanded and there was the suggestion that the student's success reflected back on his or her families and teachers. Again, this perception was the external view. The internal view indicated that the student's perception of success was that it directly reflected on the individual. Internally, a student's self-concept might adjust depending on their

perception of their abilities as judged and ranked by the test score, they understand that they now belong to a category bounded by the test. In Cami's example, her success on the ACT indicated that she now belonged to a category of students that attained that specific score on the exam. This category came with certain opportunities, and for Cami, the knowledge that she belonged to a category that ranked above her brother in this respect. This evidence also supports the idea that a student's self-concept is formed from both internal and external influences, as well as the bounded categories that he or she belongs to.

As the amount of testing has increased in the United States, evidence suggests that the impact of the individual tests has possibly been reduced. Therefore, I feel it is important understand the cumulative effect of tests on a student's life. If a student continually perceives that he or she is failing tests, then the student's self-concept is going to be reflective of that. Conversely if the student continually perceives that he or she is succeeding on tests, then the student's self-concept is going to be reflective of that. However, most students do not perceive that they fail all tests nor do they perceive that they succeed on all tests. It is a combination of the internal and external influences from these failures and successes that develops the student's overall self-concept. This self-concept is dependent on what opportunities and limitations the student has available to him or her based on perceived failures and successes on tests.

In thinking about the cumulative impact of testing events, I would also like to explore how a student might experience minor failures and successes. These minor failures and success were not addressed directly in my data, so I have engaged in a brief thought experiment to explore how these might impact a student (see Maxwell 2005:58-63). Take a fictional student, Susie. Susie is a high school student and has never been very good at math. She has always struggled to scrape passing grades on tests and spends a tremendous amount of time studying for

this subject. As Susie is an A/B student, these barely passing test scores in her math classes are perceived as failures.

It has become apparent to Susie that despite repeated attempts to change her preparation approaches (getting additional help from her teacher and working with a tutor outside of school), she is simply not capable of doing any better. However, Susie does excel in her writing class, and though Susie has always dreamed of becoming a meteorologist, lately, her career goals have shifted towards journalism. As a result of repeated testing failures on math tests, Susie understands that these limit her future opportunities. She is not part of a category of students who excel in math; rather she is a member of a category of students who are poorly skilled at math. She understands that her dream of becoming a meteorologist has become less likely as this career path is heavily math based, and as a result, she began shifting her goals towards a subject that she has had previous success in and in which she belongs to a category that provides opportunities instead of limitations. Nevertheless, Susie's math failures do not mean that her entire self-concept is that she is a failure; she's likely compartmentalized that idea to math or even to one specific math topic. She has taken the cumulative data from the math tests and has shifted her future opportunities based on these data.

These concept shifts in a person's future opportunities are most apparent with the major testing events that were demonstrated in the data such as the SAT, ACT, GRE, MCAT, etc. As seen from Cami and Jane's examples, if a student fails the MCAT, this will serve as a significant limitation to the student's future. The student must make a decision based on that failure as to how to proceed. However, it is the cumulative effect of testing which results in a person's overall understanding of their opportunities and limitations across the life course.

In conclusion, examination events impact students over the life course and their perception of opportunities available to them. The transformative effect of tests has been shown to be an influential factor in this impact. However, the internal perception is just as important in influencing transformations as external influences. Finally, by looking at student's cumulative testing experiences, I have shown how these build to form an overall perception of a student's abilities and opportunities in life.

CONCLUSIONS

During my analysis, I utilized my conceptual framework and evidence from my data to support my ideas. I developed three major ideas throughout the analysis. First, tests are not individual events; rather, they are interrelated. My analysis examined the relationship between testing events by focusing on how these testing events relate to each other within time. Whether the student perceives their test performance as a success or a failure will influence how he or she chooses to prepare for the subsequent test. Interestingly, I found that testing events are not entirely individual. My evidence suggests that students rely on social networks to alter their preparatory approaches following a testing failure. This is one area that I think is especially interesting and may warrant future research, in addition to looking into other relational aspects of the testing event. These could include the relationship between the times of year testing events are given and how a change in the test structure or the type of questions asked on one test may relate to another (personal communication Rhine 2011).

Additionally, I have purposely avoided discussions of race, class, and gender in this thesis. Though I acknowledge that these issues have significant impact on students' perceptions, given the limitations and the narrow focus of this thesis, I have chosen to center my attention on

the perspectives that were identified by students which directly pertain to testing events. Given this limitation, I am recommending the need for a wider study, one which encompasses a greater gender, ethnographic, and class scope and is able to encompass these perceptions under a much broader perspective.

Secondly, I agree with Hanson's argument that tests are transformative and create that which they intend to measure, including categories which are bounded by the test itself. However, a student's internal perception of the event was demonstrated to be just as important as external influences are to this process. The analysis looked at transformative examples that relied on external influences as well as examples that combined internal and external influences.  This internal aspect of transformations is a differentiating aspect of my conceptual framework from the established framework.

Finally, by looking at a student's cumulative testing experiences, I demonstrated how these influence the student's perception of their opportunities in life. The analysis showed that increases in exposure to testing have resulted in a reduction in the impact of the individual test. This indicated that the cumulative effect of testing events is more influential on a student's self-concept and life course than an individual testing event. The cumulative effect of testing events results in a person's culturally constructed understanding of their abilities and inabilities, as well as opportunities and limitations across the life course.

Based on these three ideas, I am able to make a few overall conclusions about how students maneuver within the structural system that tests create. Tests create and guard categories to which students desire to belong. In order to belong to these categories, students must be transformed based on the abilities represented within the test. Students may be successful or unsuccessful at achieving these transformations. Successful students will continue on, given the

opportunities that belonging to these categories allow. However, it is most interesting to look at the ways students behave when faced with a testing failure, which excludes them from these categories. Evidence from this study, indicates that students have three options following a testing failure. First, a student may continue attempting to transform him or herself based on that testing event and will make future attempts to be successful at the test and to gain access to the category the test guards. Second, a student may address other options which are still open to them despite the limitations imposed by the testing failure. These other options may result in a new transformation process, based on a different test, in order that the student may gain access to a new category. Finally, a student may concede defeat and give up entirely on transforming themselves. This option would negatively impact a student's self-concept and would limit the options a student has for his or her future.

Testing events are very interesting phenomena to study; in that they are constructed representations of a student's abilities based on social norms. The impact of these constructions is pertinent to understanding how individuals recognize and maneuver within the boundaries of this system. By looking at students' experiences of testing events and bringing their voice into the literature, it allows researchers to begin to understand the impact testing has on individuals. The ideas reflected in this thesis, especially that the cumulative effect of testing events across a student's life course, does affect students' perceptions of opportunities and limitations available to them and the options they have to maneuver within these constructs, indicates the impact that testing has had on the culture within the United States. It is important to challenge the traditional theories set out by psychologists about intelligence and testing in order to understand the social implications surrounding testing events. Therefore, it is imperative that these implications continue to be studied by social scientists, particularly considering the growing impact testing

has had on the educational system in the United States since the implementation of the NCLB act.

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**APPENDICES**


APPENDIX A: ORAL CONSENT PROCEDURE


As a Student in the University of Kansas's Department of Anthropology, I am conducting a research project about students' perspectives on standardized testing. I would like to interview to obtain your views on standardized testing and how these events may have affected your life. You have no obligation to participate and you may discontinue your involvement at any time. The interview will take about 45 minutes; however, if at any time during the interview you feel uncomfortable, we may either skip the question or discontinue the interview. I would like to use a digital audio recording device during the interview; this will allow the interview to be transcribed at a later date. If you do not feel comfortable with the interview being recorded, it will not be used.

Participation in the interview indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. The data from this interview will be used to complete both a school project and a master's thesis project. However, any identifying characteristics such as your name will remain confidential; a pseudonym will be used in all written documentation when referring to this interview.

Should you have any questions about this project or your participation in it, you may ask me or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Allan Hanson at the Department of Anthropology. Should you need to contact me following the interview, please email me at skleine@ku.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at (785) 864-7429 or email mdenning@ku.edu.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your name, age, and year in school?
2. What state did you grow up in?

3. What do you think of when you think of standardized testing?
4. Can you tell me about some of your experiences with tests?
   (For example, standardized or high-stakes tests?)

5. Can you tell me about the last major test you took?
6. Can you tell me about how you would prepare for a major test like this?

7. Are you preparing for or expecting to need to take any major tests in the future?
8. What do you think would happen if you didn't take the test or if you performed badly?

9. Can you tell me about a time you did really well on a test?
10. Can you tell me about a time you did not do very well on a test?

11. Have you ever felt discriminated against on a test for any reason?
12. Would you mind sharing with me what ethnic group or groups you identify with?