



# **University Admission Tests: Are Minority Outcomes Disparate by Design?**

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**The Princeton Review Foundation**

**TRPI Education Conference**

**October 15, 2007**

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## Some Princeton Review Foundation Nonprofit Program Partners



- (SAT/ACT) Hispanic Scholarship Fund, Fulfillment Fund, United Way of Dallas, KIPP Schools, etc.
- (LSAT) Hispanic National Bar Foundation, CLEO, True Potential, etc.
- (GMAT) Management Leadership for Tomorrow
- (MCAT) SNMA – Student National Medical Ass'n

## White/Mexican American Comparison



- White preference question: whites answer the question correctly at a higher % than Mexican Americans
- Mex. Am. preference question: the opposite, Mexican Americans answer correctly at a higher % than whites
- No preference question: same % for both whites and Mexican Americans



# My Warm Up Question: White or Mex. Am. Preference?



22. IRREVOCABLE : ANNUL ::
- (A) palpable : touch
  - (B) disquieting : pacify
  - (C) countless : enumerate
  - (D) redundant : repeat
  - (E) minute : enlarge



# The “irrevocable” Question Is a “No Preference” Question



22. IRREVOCABLE : ANNUL ::

- (A) palpable : touch
- (B) disquieting : pacify
- (C) countless : enumerate
- (D) redundant : repeat
- (E) minute : enlarge

22% of whites and  
Mex. Ams. got this correct

Oct., 1998 SAT, Section 1, #22



# The “security blanket” Question: White or Mex. Am. Preference?



7. At bedtime the security blanket served the child as \_\_\_\_\_ with seemingly magical powers to ward off frightening phantasms.

- (A) an arsenal (B) an incentive (C) a talisman**  
**(D) a trademark (E) a harbinger**



# The “security blanket” Question is a Mex. Am. Pref. Question



7. At bedtime the security blanket served the child as \_\_\_\_\_ with seemingly magical powers to ward off frightening phantasms.

- (A) an arsenal    (B) an incentive    (C) a talisman  
(D) a trademark    (E) a harbinger

49% of Mex. Ams. and  
46% of whites (3% gap)  
got this correct



# The Data Sets From Two SAT Administrations



**About 400,000 students take the SAT every October. Data sets from the Oct. 1998 & Oct. 2000 SAT were purchased from ETS, each of which contains:**

- For 100,000 randomly-chosen students, all their answers to every test question, plus**
- All their answers to the Student Descriptive Questionnaire (ethnicity, race, gender, etc.)**

**For each individual SAT question, we calculated the % (of whites, Mex. Ams., etc.) answering correctly**



## White/Mex. Am. Analysis of 2 SATs: October, 1998 and October, 2000



- 60 math & 78 verbal questions per test (138 total), 2 tests:

**276** questions

- Query: How many Mex. Am. preference questions? White preference questions? (Whites score higher.)

- The number of **Mex. Am.** preference questions out of 275 is:

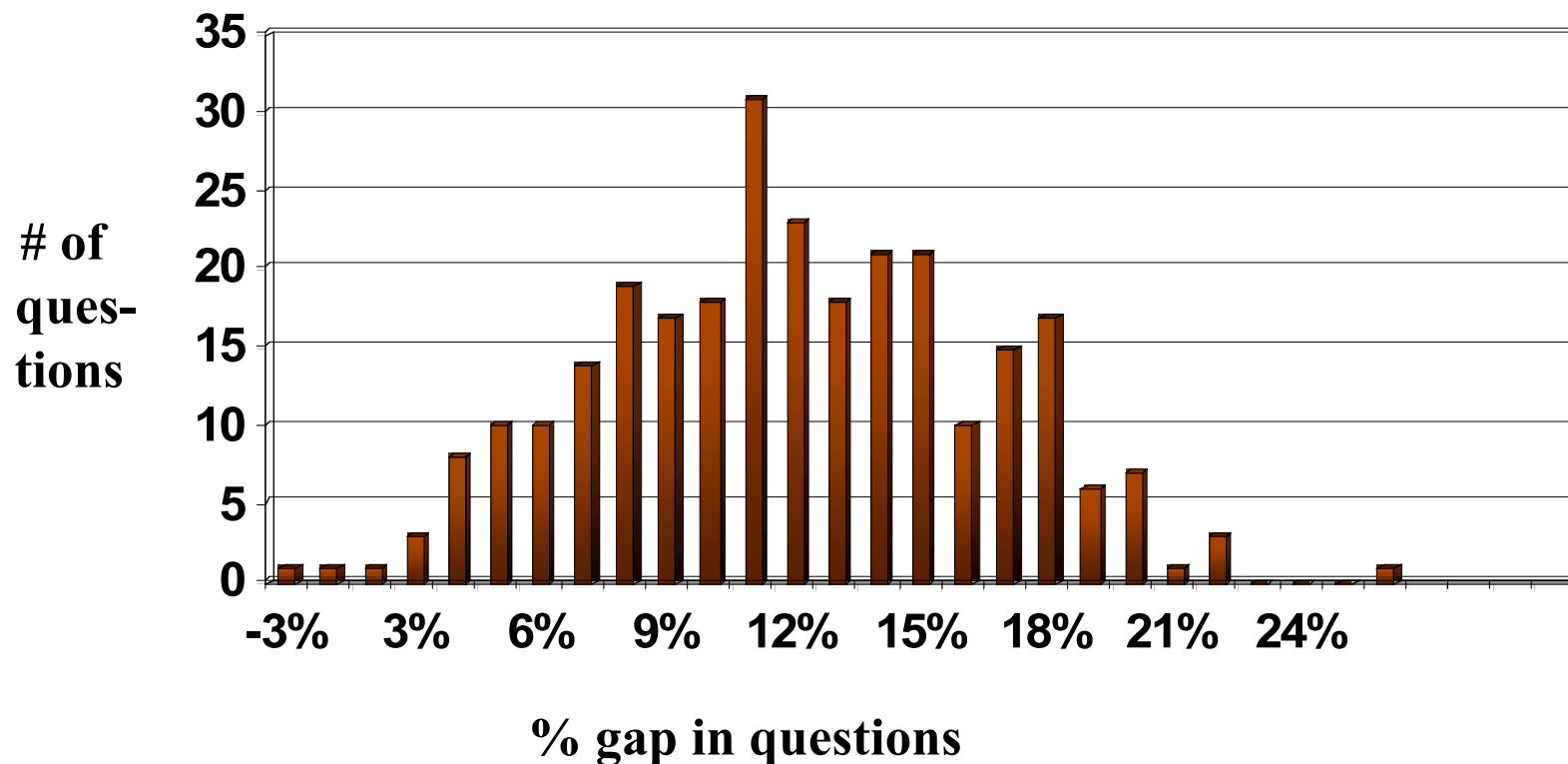
**1** question

- The number of **white** preference questions out of 275 is:

**274** questions



# Distribution of White/Mex Am Gaps in Oct. 1998 and Oct. 2000 Data Sets



## Why? “Colorblind” Biserial Correlation



- “Each individual SAT question ETS chooses is required to parallel the outcomes of the test overall. So, if high-scoring test-takers – who are more likely to be white - tend to answer the question correctly in pretesting, it’s a worthy SAT question; if not, it’s thrown out. Race and ethnicity are not considered explicitly, but racially disparate scores drive question selection, which in turn reproduces racially disparate test results in an internally reinforcing cycle.” *The Nation*, April 14, 2003, pg. 24.

## Conclusions of Preference Analysis



- **Virtually all SAT questions capture something about ethnicity (and race, and gender) that can't be seen by just looking at the questions.**
- **The SAT is a white preference test, designed by selecting 99% white preference questions.**

**Note: without data, I can confidently say that the CAHSEE, GRE, ACT, etc. are similar.**

- **What about the “new” SAT, since 2005? ETS & CB recently refused to provide me with any more data (would anyone else like to try to get it?).**

# Other Perspectives on this Analysis



- The recent work of Dr. Marta Tienda:  
“Diversity, Opportunity and the Shifting Meritocracy in Higher Education,” Alon & Tienda, August, 2007 *American Sociological Review* on the use of the SAT and affirmative action, “... show(s) how affirmative action was required because the weight placed on test scores ... rose over time ...”
- The fine work of Dr. Eugene Garcia, with whom I differ on one very important point



## Long Term and Short Term (JayR@review.com)



- **Long term – advocate abolition of tests (1979)**
- **Short term – help Latino/a students get their best test scores (differ with Dr. Garcia), working with nonprofit orgs., speaking to groups of URM students (UCLA Law Fellows), affirmative action**

**NOTE: Latino/a students with high test scores are the most powerful advocates for abolition (or, if they are silent, the strongest reason to maintain the great weight on tests).**

- **Suggest that high scoring Latino/a students train to teach the SAT, LSAT, etc. (send them to me!)**