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The False Premise of America's Education Reform

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Although it is one of the strongest countries in the world, America has an education system that consistently underperforms compared with other developed countries. Standardized tests, which gauge basic skills such as math and reading, are a strong measure of national academic achievement. American students test far below those of countries like Singapore, China, Finland, and Japan that are known for scoring particularly well. Aware of their students' underperformance in comparison with students in those countries, Americans

mistakenly implement education reform initiatives that are expected to drive up test scores. Our frenzied focus on improving test scores results in a sort of tunnel vision that impairs education officials. They are so intent on improving a single indicator of educational quality that other, less obvious yet more important factors – teaching quality and the level of school resources, among others – are left out. Education reform efforts in America are inefficient. In attempting to improve standardized test performance, they tend to avoid key issues that actually exacerbate larger problems.

The majority of education reform initiatives overlook the outsized impact that a child's neighborhood or community, as measured by zip code, has in determining the trajectory of his or her life. Unsurprisingly, some studies have shown that public schools in areas of lower socioeconomic status fare much worse than those in affluent communities. Lower-income students, especially in the inner cities, face greater barriers to academic success. Such students often must learn in dilapidated schools that lack adequate resources, and face the added daily hardship of trying to safely walk or ride to their schools. Reform initiatives like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT) tried to improve education by focusing on rapid

achievement. The problem with their premises, however, is that you cannot hope to begin improving school curricula or teaching until you have solid facilities for children to learn in. Education reform should not overlook less measurable factors that contribute to positive experiences, including better learning, in the classroom.

Developing motivated, high-performing students requires effective teaching. Rather than imposing more curricular changes on teachers, reform initiatives should instead provide them with more opportunities to

learn how to devise effective lesson plans and how to interact better with students. Professional development of this kind is one way to strengthen educators' knowledge of teaching, thus resulting in improved classroom atmospheres.

More attention to professional development would greatly benefit teacher-student interactions, since teachers would have a better understanding of how to engage students in the classroom. Most American education reform is oblivious to the important, often small factors that contribute to the lofty goal of improvement in standardized test scores. A revitalized reform effort would focus less on achievement as measured by scores, and more on improving both student motivation and preparation and teacher quality.

America still has a long way to go in terms of improving our education system. Achievement on tests will always be an important indicator of its general achievement, because it measures our students' performance relative to those of other countries. However, it is vital to understand that a lot of factors go into producing better test results. More reforms should be based on an understanding of the various factors that contribute to better achievement on tests and elsewhere in education, and on a knowledge of how to improve those factors.

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The Pedophile Problem Circulating YouTube

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YouTube has allegedly been facilitating child exploitation through a wormhole in its censorship algorithm. YouTuber MattsWhatItIs uploaded a video titled "Youtube is Facilitating the Sexual Exploitation of Children, and it's Being Monetized," noting that once one of these videos depicting children in compromising positions is accessed, several others are then recommended through the suggested section. Many of these videos simply depict young girls and boys doing gymnastics or stretching, but at times they show sexually suggestive content that users time-stamp in the

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comments section. Many of these videos have millions of views and are being monetized through advertisements.

Several advertisers, including Nestlé, Epic Games, and AT&T, pulled their advertisements from YouTube following reports that they were being promoted alongside these objectifying videos. Some of the companies have stated that until Google, YouTube's owner, can fully ensure that their advertisements are not being promoted alongside offensive content, they are pulling them all out indefinitely. In 2017, hundreds of companies pulled money from YouTube after concerns about ads placed alongside troubling content, such as videos made by hate groups. But they returned to the site last year after YouTube confirmed that measures were being taken to flag and ban this type of

continued on back

content through a more efficient system.

According to *Wired* magazine, YouTube claims their algorithm is 99 percent effective in ensuring that advertisements appear only with appropriate content, yet this does not seem to be the case with many of these exploitative videos. The issue has raised concern before and has left many wondering why this “wormhole” hasn’t been properly resolved. The comments left on these videos are also serving as a platform on which pedophiles engage with each other, listing Whatsapp numbers and links to child pornography and promising to deliver more illegal content. Even more troubling, some of the children who upload the videos respond

to comments from users which ask intimate, highly suggestive questions, including where they live. The majority of the comments are posted in foreign languages, including Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese, which indicates that YouTube’s flagging system may not work as efficiently with non-English languages.

Despite the allegations and the recent withdrawals by advertisers, YouTube maintains that the company “aggressively” ensures its policies are followed and reports any content endangering minors to authorities. Taking into account the thousands of videos along with comments that are threatening children’s safety, the question about whether YouTube is fully addressing this pedophile problem raises several red flags.

Given the website’s accessibility, parents are often unaware that their children are posting videos to YouTube and are therefore oblivious to the dangers they face. With many of these videos, comments are not disabled, and advertisements lure what should be considered illegal money into a system that is profiting from the exploitation of minors. While these recent allegations have been circulating for about a month now, this is not the first time YouTube has come under fire for enabling access to sexually explicit and unethical content. These issues have yet to be addressed fully in the public light, and YouTube should definitely enforce a stricter system in order to fully erase these videos and terminate the pedophilic activity on the platform.

Should Women Have to Register for the Draft?

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In a recent court case, *National Coalition for Men v. Selective Service System (NCFM v. SSS)*, Judge Gray H. Miller ruled that a male-only military draft is unconstitutional, finding it violates the Due Process clause of the Fifth Amendment. Although such a ruling will not produce immediate change in the draft system – Congress is currently writing a report on it, and the Supreme Court will likely take up the case – the ruling is a high-profile instance of a “legacy” system conflicting with modern notions of equality and perhaps with political popularity.

As the law currently stands, all American men between the ages of 18 and 25 must register with the Selective Service System, the governmental body tasked with conducting a military draft if need be. Young men who refuse to register are potentially subject to a fine of up to \$250,000 and up to five years in prison, although prosecutions were suspended in 1988. And draft registration doesn’t just bear on possible military service. More practically and immediately, there is the fact that for many Americans, access to a wide range of federal programs – including federal student aid – requires Selective Service registration.

A 2015 Defense Department decision to open all military combat roles to women made a legal challenge to the current draft system possible or more feasible. Since then, a growing number of women have joined combat units. While many people have lauded the department’s decision as an advance for

gender equality, it has faced considerable criticism as well. Nevertheless, integration of women into combat roles has allowed the plaintiffs in *NCFM v. SSS* to argue that because no combat roles are closed to women, a male-only draft is discriminatory and violates the Due Process clause. The Selective Service System has argued that it simply enforces the law as enacted by Congress, which says that only men must register.

Because no concrete changes have yet occurred to the draft registration system, public response has been relatively muted. But a split in opinion certainly exists. A 2016 Rasmussen poll showed that 52 percent of women opposed having to register for Selective Service, while 61 percent of men favored women being required to register. Politicians have been slightly more vocal

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than the general populace. Senator Ted Cruz, a Republican, opposes making women register for the draft, while Senator Tammy Duckworth, a Democrat and veteran, has said that because all combat roles are open to women, they should have to register.

Should women be compelled to register for the draft? The answer requires

an examination of two issues: military effectiveness and gender equality. The debate still rages on whether the inclusion of women in combat roles negatively affects combat effectiveness. The Marine Corps has released a study indicating that in key tests of combat readiness, mixed-sex combat teams performed far below the standards set by all-male combat teams. If women’s presence in such roles does affect a unit’s readiness for combat, how do we implement our society’s desire to keep our troops safe while fostering gender equality?

Although society has not yet reached consensus for a draft including women, policy makers have reached the conclusion that all combat roles should be open to women. Because of this, women should be compelled register for the draft. As policy currently stands, policy makers have in effect judged that the importance of gender equality in the military supersedes any concerns, however valid or invalid, about combat effectiveness. This makes irrelevant one of the primary arguments for not including women in draft registration: the contention that they will not be effective in meeting the military’s needs in the case of a draft. Since the same combat opportunities are now open to men and women, not drafting women solely based on their sex is immoral and a form of gender discrimination. Even though drafting women may be unpopular with women, our society has long strived to hold the principles of equality above principles of political popularity, despite uneven success in doing so.

Gender equality in combat and gender equality in the draft must stand or fall together. If women were not permitted in combat roles, then the rationale for drafting them in the case of war would be weak. However, since we do not restrict women from any combat roles, they must be subject to the same civic duties as men and be required to register for the draft.

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#YouTubePedophiles
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#DraftingWomen