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High School Graduation Rates and College Entrance: A Small Scale Comparison Between Select Orphanages in India and Select U.S. Groups

1. Introduction

This essay is intended as a micro level comparison of educational results and graduation rates between select orphanages in India versus select macro level groups of U.S. students. We will examine the expectations, environments, and potential life trajectories of these two communities of children from drastically different backgrounds. Finally, this essay will identify compelling factors influencing each group, for better or worse.

High school 12th grade graduation rates and college entrance rates will be presented both for impoverished and at-risk American children, as well as rates for American children in general. High school ends at 10th grade (10th Standard or STD) in India. Typically, this is followed by a two year college program (11th and 12th STD) leading to a three year university with a Bachelor's degree upon completion. For those not pursuing this path, a two or three year vocational training path is common after 10th STD.

The author has an interest in comparative education having attended a variety of schools while growing up including a British run international school in Stockholm, Sweden; two international schools and a private school in Bangkok, Thailand; and several U.S. public schools in California, Florida and North Carolina in the early 1960's through mid-1970's. Additionally, his son attended public schools (1989 – 2003) and his daughter private schools (1999 – 2013) in California. This case study is motivated by his observations of the attributes, expectations and results of the various education systems which have touched his life vs. the education that is currently being delivered to U.S. children and the children with whom he works in India.

2. Indian and American Factors

Indian Factors

For full transparency, the author is Founder and President of Hope Abides, a small charity which helps orphanages in India. The orphanages to be presented are some of the partners with whom we work. This essay will examine the success rates of the Hope Abides children (sometimes referred to in this essay as "HA children or kids" or "our kids") who by most generally accepted standards would be considered high-risk and impoverished.

The culture of India is ancient having existed approximately 5,000 years. During that time it has been influenced by wave after wave of immigrants, conquerors and a variety of other social and religious influences. Perhaps two of the bigger influences currently driving Indian culture are the legacy of British colonialism (History Discussion) and over 2,000 years of the Hindu caste system (Ghose, 2018).

Within the Hindu caste system the lowest group are the Untouchables, also known as Dalits. The label of Untouchable stems from the jobs that they perform. Typical jobs include the disposal of corpses, handling of waste, and catching rats. In some eras, if a Dalit let his shadow touch a higher caste member he risked being severely beaten (Hays, 2015). Although unable to find written documentation, the author has been told there were times and regions in India's history in which Dalits could be killed for such an offense. By any conceivable standard many of the HA children come from atrocious backgrounds that most Westerners could not imagine.

This essay will look specifically at graduation rates of two of the Hope Abides orphanage partners. These are by U.S. standards highly at-risk children. They are children who have been orphaned, abandoned or voluntarily surrendered. Some of these children are HIV positive. All were born into impoverished situations, many have suffered from malnutrition, and all, to one extent or another, suffer from the existing remnants of the caste system.

American Factors

Risk factors and influencers inside and outside the classroom for American children include a large percentage of single-parent households (Figure 1), a strong culture of individualism (Figure 2, life within a highly materialistic, consumer driven (Azar, 2009) and a fairly indulgent society (Figure 3).

June 12, 2018

Single Parents Are Raising More Than One-Third of U.S. Kids

**Likelihood that
kids grow up in
a single-parent
family, by race
& ethnicity
in 2016**

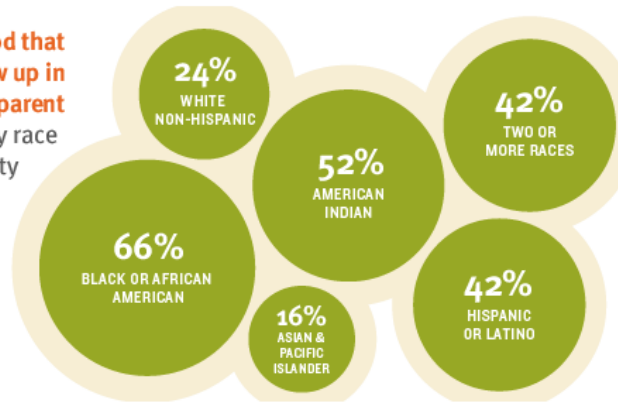


Figure 1
(Kids Count Data Center, 2018)

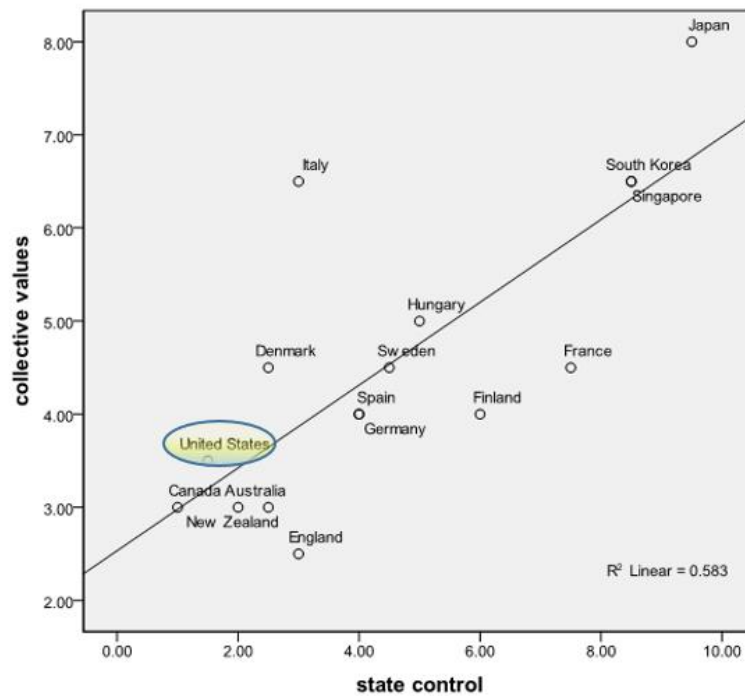


Figure 2
(Janmaat et al., 2013)

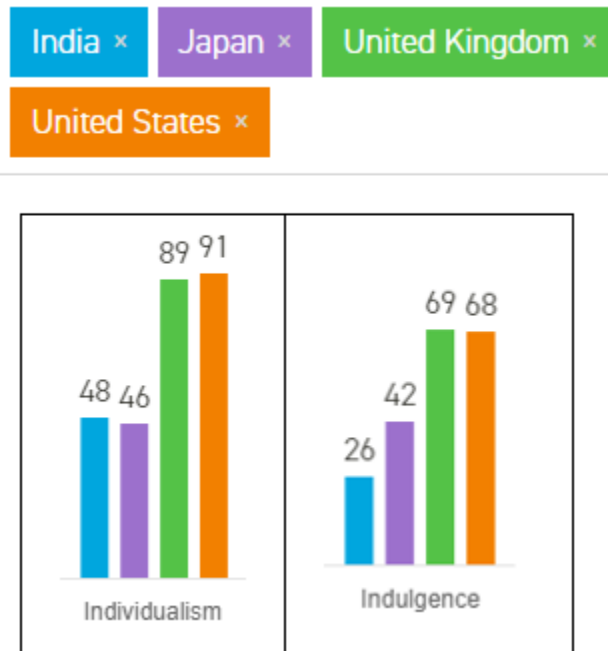


Figure 3
The Hofstede Insights Culture Compass is a tool to assess individual preferences at the level of national cultures.
Scale of 1 – 100; 76 countries

American popular culture, with its emphasis on who has what, the latest product that is a “must-have”, and the frenzy of social media creates an environment of compulsive comparison in which anxiety can be a constant presence in one’s life where relief, satisfaction and contentment are always just out of reach (Gregoire, 2017).

Most people would acknowledge that the U.S. is the most influential country in the world today and arguably the only existing super power at the moment (Mead and Keeley, 2017). For good or bad, many countries look to the U.S. for various social trends and solutions. The U.S. is a highly individualistic country in which often, to quote *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984), “... the needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many.” Of course, there are always exceptions and arguments to be made against this viewpoint, but various surveys and studies including the graph used in class (Figure 2), highlight the extent to which individualism (i.e. low collective values) is a key attribute of America.

America also has a legacy of rebellion. In the late 1700’s the country was founded out of a rebellion against England. It fought a brutal Civil War in the 1800’s in which the South tried to secede from the North through rebellion. One of its most iconic movies from the 1950s is *Rebel Without a Cause* which highlighted the nascent anxiety and rebelliousness of modern youth (Levy, 2005); and in the late middle 1960s through the early seventies the young generation of baby boomers rebelled against the Vietnam War, the establishment, anybody over 30, and the traditional values of the 50’s (Saylor Academy, 2013). These are all historical factors that have become embedded into the

soul of the country and which therefore influence its children and education system.

Additionally, American children are bombarded from infancy with a highly capitalistic and consumer oriented culture. The non-stop marketing has a detrimental impact on a child's expectation of many aspects of life including how they are educated and the roles of children and adults at home and at school (Dittmann, 2004 and Wilcox et al., 2004).

The author contends that India, and its education system, is much less individualistic than American culture and more communal in nature. This paper will examine success rates such as high school graduation and college entrance between at-risk children in both countries.

American children possess an overly excessive level confidence and self-esteem which often is disconnected from actual levels of accomplishment (Zoller Booth and Gerard, 2011). Americans of all races, including minority children, still face issues created by centuries of slavery and institutionalized racism. There is a growing sense of entitlement, despair and angst in the country especially amongst its young (Twenge, 2014). Social Justice strategies and solutions within the educational framework often highlight the role of individuals or groups as victims which may exacerbate these and other negative feelings (Zitek et al., 2010 and Ley, D. 2014).

Poverty as defined globally is minimal in the U.S.* but as defined on an American basis is a significant factor in the communities of many at-risk children. The influence of drugs is felt throughout the country and at every strata of society, but more drastically in low income neighborhoods and schools (Drug Policy Alliance).

While many American children do well scholastically and most become productive and independent adults, a case can be made that in a country with so much material wealth far too many fall through the cracks and the numbers are growing.

* According to the government's own survey data, in 2005, the average household defined as poor by the government lived in a house or apartment equipped with air conditioning and cable TV. The family had a car and a third of the poor have two or more cars (Sheffield, R. 2011).

3. Select Orphanages in India and Select U.S. Groups (Actual names and locations used with permission)

INDIA ORPHANGE 1

Sphoorti Foundation is in the large Indian city of Hyderabad, Telangana. Hyderabad is a major technology center in the country and home to approximately seven million people. Sphoorti Foundation was established 10 years ago by an exceptional young man named Srivyal Vuyyuri. Srivyal earned his bachelor's degree in India in which he was

top of his class. He subsequently came to the U.S. and earned his master's degree in economics at a major Ohio university. Upon his return to India Srivyal worked as a teacher for a short period; quickly deciding he could accomplish more in life, and with support from his family, he started an orphanage - Sphoorti Foundation. It is run as a largely secular orphanage with all holidays (religious and otherwise) celebrated, but no formal religious instruction or worship.

As of July 2018 Sphoorti cares for over 250 children. Sphoorti recently moved most of their children from a location in urban Hyderabad that consisted of a cluster of non-contiguous buildings to a three acre walled compound in a more rural area outside the city. It is shaping up to have the feel of a small village.

Most of the Sphoorti's children are abandoned, surrendered or orphaned. Despite coming from impoverished, and by U.S. standards backgrounds which would be considered at-risk, observational evidence suggests that most of the Sphoorti children do not suffer from mental issues impacting many U.S. children such as depression, anorexia, bulimia, cutting and suicidal thoughts. In the U.S. these levels of poverty and childhood trauma are often associated with a sense of entitlement or feelings of despair or hostility. These traits do not seem to manifest in the Sphoorti children.

It is worthwhile to note that they have no access to television or other media. They occasionally will be taken to see selected movies at the theater and have limited exposure to the internet via school and their on-site computer lab. The protected, village-like environment facilitates interaction amongst the children while also allowing quiet space for study or time alone. Tutoring is provided for those needing additional help for critical 10th and 12th STD exams.

Most of the children attend English medium schools and have very high rates of graduation from high school and into college (which is 11th STD and 12th STD) followed by very high rates of entering into university. Not only do they exhibit high graduation rates (100%), but their goals tend to be high, professional level goals.

Sphoorti Foundation

All children who entered 9th STD in 2014/2015

Students on university track

Child's Name	9 th STD 2014/15 Y/E Marks	10 th STD 2015/16 Y/E Marks	Track	Entered College 11 th STD?	11 th STD 2016/17 Y/E Marks	12 th STD 2017/18 Y/E Marks	Started University 2018/19?
Sunita	84.0	8.8	Physical Sciences	Yes	95.0	96.0	Yes

Swapna	74.0	7.8	Commerce	Yes	84.0	78.0	Yes
Swarna	81.0	8.0	Physical Sciences	Yes	88.0	89.0	Yes
Siddharth	77.0	8.7	Physical Sciences	Yes	93.0	93.0	Yes
Sashidhar	69.0	8.5	Physical Sciences	Yes	92.0	92.7	Yes
Sudheer	71.0	8.0	Physical Sciences	Yes	90.0	93.0	Yes
Jeswanth	68.0	7.5	Physical Sciences	Yes	82.0	78.0	Yes
Revanth	69.5	7.0	Commerce	Yes	68.5	70.0	Yes
Vamsi Babu	76.5	7.6	Bio Sciences	Yes	75.6	74.0	Yes

INDIA ORPHANAGE 2 (Actual names and locations used with permission)

Mission for the Rural People (MRP) is located in the village of Vellatur in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The village has a population of less than 6,000 and, as is indicated in the name, is in a rural area.

Pastor Ratnam Pallikonda and his wife Suneetha directly care for approximately 120 children, plus three widows, in a Christian environment. Pastor Ratnam earned a Bachelor's degree in Pharmacology in addition to receiving an education in Christian Religious studies. His wife Suneetha is a dynamic woman who is well-educated and helps in the running of the orphanage. She also runs a micro-finance scheme for local women and acts as headmistress for the school built by Mission for the Rural People in partnership with an NGO from the UK.

As with all the orphanages in this study, the children come from a variety of impoverished and at-risk backgrounds. These include children who are completely orphaned and others who may have only a single parent. Some of the children have been abandoned, while the more fortunate were voluntarily surrounded (due to extreme poverty and the inability to care for the child) to the orphanage, but are still in touch with their family members. Several children are HIV positive. Some are former beggars.

Several of the children at MRP come from a nearby Dalit village where their parents are day laborers. The people of this particular village work either as laborers in a variety of back breaking jobs, or as rat catchers for local farmers. The rats double as a source of income and as food.

These children in particular can be considered some of the most impoverished and at-risk in the world. The village only recently (within the past year) has had access to electricity. The people of the village largely acquire their water from a nearby river which

is also used for communal bathing, laundry and the washing of water buffalo. There is no infrastructure nor protections in place to control the inflow of effluents to the river.

MRP is set in a small compound which includes dorms, a church, an outdoor cooking area and a dining hall currently under construction. They are surrounded by agricultural fields and immediately across the street is their recently built English medium school. The children live in a highly sheltered environment away from many of the influences of modern culture including television, social media and the impacts of materialism and runaway capitalism. A sense of entitlement is seldom displayed and a child's self-esteem is not an educational goal. Confidence is acquired through accomplishment with gentle coaxing, praise, or when needed, discipline.

The home does receive numerous visitors each year from the US, UK and other countries and so the children have a chance to practice their English and learn about other places and possibilities. Despite the large number of children under their care, the Pastor and Suneetha manage to make it feel like one large family unit. The children know they are loved and that their needs are met. Despite the "traumatic" backgrounds of these children there are no anorexics, cutters, bulimics nor signs of suicidal thoughts or deep depression.

Academically, as with Spohoorti, we see 100% graduation rates from high school and entry into post 10th STD education. While the overall grades are not as high as Spohoorti, all of the children have passed 10th STD and have either passed college and entered university, or have pursued a three year vocational program. The difference in grades can likely be attributed to factors such as lack of quality tutoring centers in the area and the fact that most of this cohort of children did not attend an English medium school. The English medium school that currently operates across from the orphanage opened in 2015.

Mission for the Rural People

All children who entered 9th STD in 2014/2015

Students on university track

Child's Name	9 th STD 2014/15 Y/E Marks	10 th STD 2015/16 Y/E Marks	Track	Entered College 11 th STD?	11 th STD 2016/17 Y/E Marks	12 th STD 2017/18 Y/E Marks	Started University 2018/19?	Notes
Preethi	83.0	8.9	Biology	Yes; BIPC	94.0	88.0	Yes	Studying B. Pharmacy
Anu	86.0	9.0	Maths	Yes; MPC	96.0	96.0	Yes	Studying bank tests and maths teacher.
Soundarya	70.0	7.5	Biology	Yes; BIPC	72.0	73.2	Yes	Studying B. Pharmacy

Mahalakshmi	65.0	7.2	Biology	Yes; BIPC	78.0	86.0	Yes	Studying Nursing
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Students on vocational or other track

Child's Name	9 th STD 2014/2015 Y/E Marks	10 th STD 2015/2016 Y/E Marks	Track	1 st year 2016/ 2017 Y/E Marks	2nd year 2016/ 2017 Y/E Marks	Con't program ?	Notes
Nandesh	7.2	74.0	Electrician				Studying ITI
Gopi Krishna	69.0	71.0	Electrician	84.0	83.9	Yes	Studying ITI

U.S. STATISTICS:

National Level:

Over the past century America has competed against, and often dominated, the world in a wide array of fields. Business and finance, medicine, automobile and aerospace production and especially technology have all been strong suits for the U.S (White, 1999).

One might assume such competitiveness would reflect positively on its education system. To one extent or another America has always relied on immigrants for some measure of brain power and innovation. However, for the 30 years or more there has been a downward spiral in America's ability to educate its population to meet the growing needs of the global economy and this country (Compton, R. & Raney, A.). Increasingly, the necessary brain power may come from China, India or other foreign sources (Baron, 2018 and Hathaway, 2017).

A country is unable to determine how well it is doing unless it is willing to compare itself to other countries. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. In 2015 over half a million students, representing 28 million 15-year-olds in 72 countries and economies, took the internationally agreed two-hour test. Students are assessed in science, mathematics, reading, collaborative problem solving and financial literacy (PISA, 2018).

Although PISA has its shortcomings and detractors it is as good a basis for global comparison as any other available resource. A review of the 2015 PISA results shows the U.S. ranks poorly compared to many developed and emerging economies: 25th in science behind countries like Portugal, Vietnam and Estonia; 24th in reading; and an abysmal 37th in maths behind countries such as Canada and Malta and marginally above Greece and Bulgaria.

It is not only the lower U.S. socioeconomic tiers that are not meeting levels of achievement we'd expect in North American education, but that the top five per cent of students are not as competitive internationally as they were a generation ago (Whyte, 2010).

Why are these facts important? “No matter what your profession – doctor, lawyer, architect, accountant – if you are an American, you better be good at the touchy-feely service stuff, because anything that can be digitized can be outsourced to either the smartest or the cheapest producer” (Friedman, 2005). While America arguably is still able to meet its need for low and mid-skill level service oriented jobs, it has been unable to meet its needs for fields that require focus, analytical skills and tenacity.

Shirley Ann Jackson an American physicist, and the eighteenth president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute is quoted in *The World is Flat Version 3.0* (pg. 372) that there are “growing opportunities for our best companies to shift more and more to foreign markets and *we don't do a better job educating our own kids to fill the gaps (italics added)*.” According to a January 2015 Pew Research Center “*Only 16% (italics added)* of American Association for the Advancement of Science scientists and 29% of the general public rank U.S. STEM education for grades K-12 as above average or the best in the world. Fully 46% of scientists and 29% of the public rank K-12 STEM as below average” (Funk and Rainie, 2015).

So if even the top U.S. students are falling behind and our overall competitiveness and quality of education is waning, how far behind are its “at-risk” children? With the caveat that U.S. high school graduation rates are prone to wildly varying figures, sometime intentionally but usually not (Malkus, 2015), the U.S. 2015/2016 high school graduation rate was 84%. For at-risk populations the specific rates were Hispanic (79%), Black (76%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (72%) students (Institute of Education Sciences, 2018). In other words, we can say that officially about 1 out of 4 racially at-risk students do not graduate from high school. The documentary *Schooling the World: The White Man's Last Burden* puts the dropout rates even higher for some the country's major urban areas ranging from 35.9% for Pittsburgh to 78.3% for Detroit (*Schooling the World: The White Man's Last Burden*, 2010).

On the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress 12th Grade Reading Level Assessment (2015), 46% of white students scored at or above proficient. Just 17% of black students and 25% of Latino students scored proficient (The Room 241 Team, 2018). In other words more than 50% of white students, about 75% of Latino (Hispanic) students and 83% of black students are below grade level or less than proficient when they leave high school. More than 30 million adults in the United States cannot read, write, or do basic math above a third grade level.

In May 2017, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2017) states that of the 3.1 million people ages 16 to 24 who graduated from high school between January and October

2016, about 2.2 million, or 69.7%, were enrolled in college in October 2016. The BLS data provided in this study breaks it down racially (at-risk) as White 69.7%, Black 58.2%, Asian 92.4 and Hispanic/Latino 72.0%. Roughly 65% of at-risk minority high school graduates enter college.

To summarize at a national level, U.S. rates of high school graduation and quality of literacy are troubling, especially for racial groups deemed as at-risk. Taking what might be optimistic graduation rates from the NCES we can place the graduation rate at about 84% and for at-risk minority groups at about 75% - again with the caveat that these rates might be overstated and that they do not necessarily indicate a proficient level of literacy or of quality education. Entry rates into college are roughly 65% for at-risk minority high school graduates.

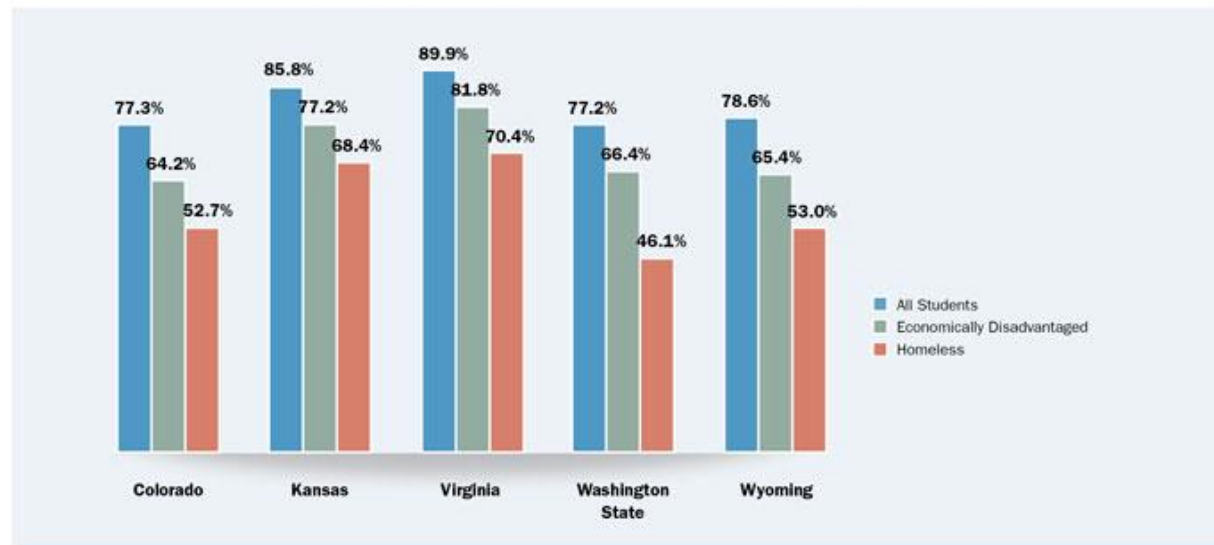
Homeless Students - McKinney Vento

The McKinney-Vento ACT of 1987 was passed to provide federal money to address homelessness. Although not originally in the act, funding was subsequently added to improve education experiences and outcomes for homeless children. Some of the main benefits to the students are expedited enrollment, transportation to school, tutoring, and mental and physical health referrals. The act is conditional meaning that states are not required to implement its conditions, but those who choose to accept the funds must abide by the terms of the act (Washington Virtual Academies, 2018).

For purposes of defining homelessness for programs under this act it is taken to mean children who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals or awaiting foster care placement; or are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, or other places not ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. It can also mean children that are temporarily doubled up due to hardship or loss of housing and migrant workers and their children who are living in the conditions described above. It also includes children who are temporarily living in motels (Cunningham, Harwood, Hall, 2010).

Only five states – Colorado, Kansas, Virginia, Washington and Wyoming currently report high school graduation rates for homeless students. In all five, rates lag well behind graduation rates for all students, even other low-income students. The gap between all students and homeless students in Washington State, for example, was 31 percentage points in 2014. Graduation rates for homeless children in these sample states range from 46% - 70%; or to state it conversely 30% - 54% do not graduate from high school (America’s Promise Alliance, 2016).

Graph 2: Class of 2014 On-time (Four-year) State High School Graduation Rate by Poverty and Housing Status



Source: Colorado Department of Education, 2013–14 State Policy Report: Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement; Kansas State Department of Education, State Level 2013–14 Graduation and Dropout Data—State-level Four- and Five-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates by Subgroup (Public Schools Only); Kansas State Department of Education, Four-year and Five-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates 2014–15 Fact Sheet; Virginia Department of Education, State-level Cohort Report, Four Year Rate—Class of 2014; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Graduation and Dropout Statistics Annual Report, April 2015; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Bulletin No. 072–11 Assessment and Student Information—Attachment 2 Class of 2011 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate Calculations; Wyoming Department of Education, “Wyoming State Graduation Rates: Federally Adjusted Graduation Rates for the 2013-14 Cohort,” <http://edu.wyoming.gov/data/graduation-rates>.

Figure 4

Foster Children:

Through the late 1800’s and well into the 1900s orphaned and at-risk children were commonly placed into orphanages. In the latter half of the 20th century and through today, foster care is the preferred route for children who are either orphaned, abandoned or from family conditions that are so severe that they require intervention. These conditions can include neglect, abandonment, addiction, incarceration or death of a parent or caretaker.

Foster care system was developed to address both real and perceived issues within the orphanage system as it existed. Orphanages were frequently overcrowded and, in some cases, children were subjected to neglect or severe abuse (Foster Care: The Basics).

Foster care children are removed from their homes and placed with pre-approved families wishing to take them in. It was seen as the optimal way to address the shortcomings of the old orphanage system.

The foster care system comes with its own set of shortcomings. Children aging out of foster care tend to have significant issues and often never successfully transition into a viable adulthood. Nearly 25% did not have a high school diploma or GED, and a mere 6% had finished a two- or four-year degree after aging out of foster care (Adoption.Life 2016). According to Foster Care to Success the most recent research shows less than 10% of foster youth graduate from college.

The National Foster Youth Institute (NFYI) finds that nationwide only about half of youth

raised in foster care end up finishing high school and less than 3% graduate from a four year college. Based on the data above 25% - 50% of foster care children do not finish high school and less than 10%, possibly less than 3% graduate from college.

COMPARISONS:

	MRP	Sphoorti	Aum Pranava Ashram	SASA	US Overall	At-risk students overall	Homeless	Foster Care
Graduated High School?	100%	100%	100%		84%	75% possibly lower	46% - 70%;	50% - 75%
Entered University or vocational program	100%	100%	54%		70%	65%	Research in process	3% - 10% *
* %'s reflect grad rates, not university entry rates								

4. Differences in Grad Rates and University Entry Rates with HA orphans in India vs. US?

There are significant differences between the HA orphans and groupings of U.S. students as presented above. The orphans at each facility have a 100% graduation rate from high school, beating not only the various U.S. at-risk groups with rates of 46% - 75%, but even beating the overall U.S. rate of 84%.

Given the fact that HA children are no longer in at-risk environments like generally at-risk American children, nor are they highly transitory like American homeless children, the orphans are probably more similar to the U.S. foster care children as opposed to the other three populations (overall, at-risk general, or homeless).

University entry rates are also markedly different. The two orphanages show all their students moving on to secondary education, and then onto university. Most of the university students pursue the fields in the sciences, medicine or commerce (business).

These university goals compare very favorably with those of university bound U.S. students (Bertrand, 2014):

	# of Students
Health Profession	269,441
Business	167,019
Engineering	144,791
Biological & Biomedical Sciences	98,691
Visual and Performing Arts	97,628
Psychology	66,461
Education	60,375
Computer Sciences	42,748
Communication and Journalism	37,402
Legal Profession	34,874

Theories for differences and conclusions:

So what is different about the Indian education system, and especially the education of

the orphans that results in their significantly higher graduation rates and college entry rates? The author believes that to some extent the Indian education system, which has its roots in the era of British colonialism retains traditional teaching methods such as rote learning and phonics. In early educational years (K – 4th grade) these methods can provide a strong foundation upon which children can build; in other words fewer children are passed along to the next grade without the necessary tools. This is more an issue of educational quality though, as opposed to graduation rates, and outside the main point of this essay.

The author believes the largest influencers on graduation are the environment and culture in which the children are raised. As mentioned throughout this essay “our kids”, though traumatized (by western standards) and impoverished, the author believes the following counterbalancing influences can help account for their success-to-date.

Firstly, the HA children reside in safe environments removed from exposure to highly negative influences such as drugs, alcohol and violence. They do not live in neighborhoods where gangs encourage them to sell drugs or threaten to beat them if they don't join. They are not influenced by subtle (or blatant) messages that portray gangsta' rappers, pimps, misogynists or alcoholic parents as role models. Instead their role models are the staff of the orphanages, their teachers and the guests and visitors with whom they interact, all with largely positive effects.

Secondly, “our kids” live in a protected world shielded from social media and pop culture (both Western and Indian). This means they don't know or care about the latest, hottest style of shoes or fashion. They don't know that a popular teen pop singer is proudly seen at parties using marijuana. They are oblivious to the fact that one of the most popular current pop icons got her start because of an “accidentally” leaked sex-tape. While this types of behavior and priorities have become normalized and common-place in the western world, they are almost entirely absent in the day-to-day lives of these children. This allows for them to be influenced by, and participate in, more healthy activities such as playing typical childhood games, developing close relationships with friends, and not falling victim to life derailing traps such as teen pregnancy, drugs or the quest for fame. Also, they are protected from the blatant materialism and commercialism that creates anxiety based on one's lack of material goods and the insinuated promise that more material goods equals more happiness.

Thirdly, the value of an education is engrained into their world and it appears the more educated the leadership team, the more this message is reinforced. Most cultures and groups will espouse the value of an education, but often this is merely lip service as we observe whether that appreciation translates into hard work. It is the assertion of this author that while the U.S. believes that it places a high importance on the education of its students, the surrounding cultural influences such as rebelliousness, entitlement, materialism or even the purpose and focus of education (is it supposed to be social justice, career preparation, nation building?) results in a “watered-down” or diminished

valuation of education as-delivered to, and perceived by, many U.S. students.

Finally, the children are not victims. As mentioned previously, almost all of these children come from troubled backgrounds, but they are not spoken of or treated as special or as victims. Each orphanage has its own program to acclimate new children into their new surroundings. It is realized that each child may take some time to fit in and feel comfortable; but they are in a caring, community in which most of them feel secure. The victimhood mentality, or special care, that many at-risk Western children receive is absent. Their sense of security, confidence or esteem does not come from a special status, an unearned award or individualized program, it comes from being in a secure, safe and structured environment. While the children may harbor some emotional scars from their previous experiences, there is not an expectation that these experiences and scars define them.

5. Conclusion?

In summary, as referenced in this essay, the author believes that U.S. children have a number of negative influences that may hamper their educational, and therefore their subsequent life trajectory. These include, but are not limited to, popular culture, an exaggerated sense of entitlement and self-esteem, and broken families. There is a corrosive element to American culture which encourages rebellious and indulgent behavior, and extreme individualism. The influence of the multi-billion dollar marketing industry creates or exacerbates a sense of anxiety and offers various products which will soothe that anxiety by making a person feel sexier, happier or special. The insinuated relief offered by the campaigns is transitory at best, only to be replaced by anxiety or desire for the next manufactured “need”. Children and teens are often the intended target (victims) of those campaigns.

Some minority groups or other at-risk groups have the added burden of drugs, gangs, poor role models and the impact of racism (both real and perceived). A sense of victimhood, although sometimes not labeled as such, is often present and leads to feelings of antipathy or “justified” anger towards those with more power or material possessions.

The Indian children who are the subject of this essay have displayed not only that some at-risk children can succeed in the context of education, but that it is possible that **almost all** can. The author does not mean to imply that these children will all transition safely (either financially or emotionally) into adulthood. Their journey is only just beginning and Indian life as an adult is fraught with its own set of hurdles and challenges. They will enter adulthood in a country plagued by widespread corruption; rampant poverty and illiteracy; widespread pollution and disease; and continued obstacles created by the caste system. All this without a traditional family infrastructure

to guide and protect them in their young adult years. That being said, educationally, these “HA children” are off to a better start than many American children.

The environments and outcomes-to-date of the Indian orphans offer another possibility for all children, especially at-risk children, which suggests that surrounding culture may be a bigger driver of the academic performance of (traumatized) students than trauma itself.

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