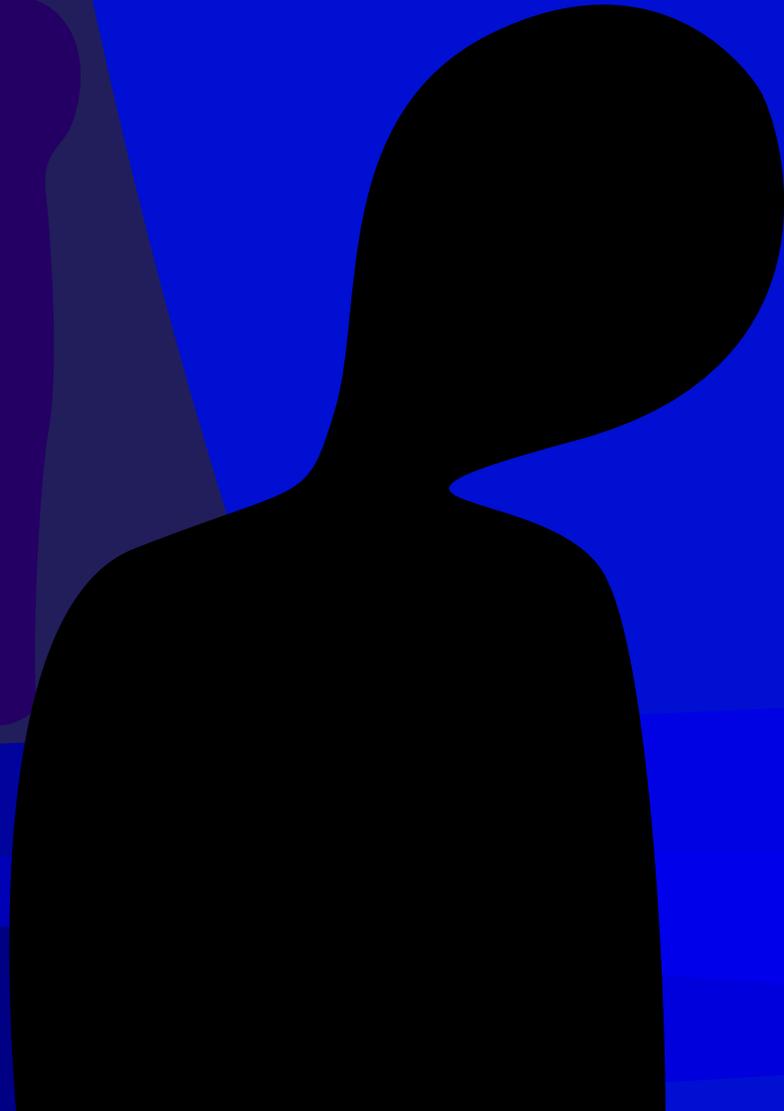


Caste in the Curriculum & THE BULLYING OF HINDU STUDENTS

SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS



Caste in the Curriculum & The Bullying of Hindu Students

Secondary Analysis of Survey Results

HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION¹²

Background

The Hindu American community has contended that the tight curricular links drawn between caste and Hinduism's spiritual teachings are questionable on the merits and, furthermore, can lead to Hindu students being bullied for their faith. The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) report "Classroom Subjected: Bullying & Bias" discusses this on page 6. This contention has been called into question by various groups such as the Sikh Coalition, who have requested evidence that "bullying is linked to the mention of caste" rather than a more generic discrimination against minorities. To better assess whether perceptions of bullying and perceptions of how caste is mentioned and taught are correlated, we at the Hindu American Foundation conducted a secondary analysis of the survey used to create the bullying report.

Methods

SURVEY CHARACTERISTICS

The current secondary analysis relies on the bullying survey HAF conducted; the methods (including the survey itself) are publicly available at the website above. Briefly, we surveyed an online convenience sample of Hindu children in grades 6 through 12 living in the United States through solicitations on electronic distribution lists from August 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015. We restricted our analysis to students who were Hindu (Question 1; 333/334 respondents).

CURRICULAR CASTE FOCUS SCALE

For the current analysis, Q10, "Which of the following statements about the caste system were you taught? Please check all that apply", was our primary predictor. There were 7 potential answers to this question, one of which was "none of the below". We converted these answers into a curricular caste focus scale (CCFS) from 0 ("none of below") to 6 (all other responses checked), with each selected response worth 1 point.

COVARIATES

In addition to the CCFS, we assessed the impact of school type (Q2), gender (Q5), grade level (Q6), the teaching of polytheism (Q11 response b), and stereotypes about Hindu practice (Q12 responses b, c, or f) as covariates in our multivariable models. These were defined as noted in Tables 2-4.

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2. HAF wishes to thank all of the organizations and individuals who helped circulate the surveys and facilitate student participation.

TABLE 1: BASELINE CHARACTERISTICS

	TOTAL IN CATEGORY	HINDUISM TAUGHT NEGATIVELY	BULLIED FOR BEING HINDU
	N	Number (%)	Number (%)
Curricular Caste Focus Scale^a			
0	74	7 (9 %)	16 (22 %)
1	33	6 (18 %)	12 (36 %)
2	26	4 (15 %)	7 (27 %)
3	46	12 (26 %)	11 (24 %)
4	54	21 (39 %)	23 (43 %)
5	54	12 (22 %)	24 (44 %)
6	41	20 (49 %)	20 (49 %)
Type of School			
Private or other	34	8 (24 %)	8 (24 %)
Public	294	74 (25 %)	105 (36 %)
Sex			
Female, Other, or Refused	147	41 (28 %)	50 (34 %)
Male	181	41 (23 %)	63 (35 %)
Grade			
6th through 9th	137	27 (20 %)	41 (30 %)
10th through 12th	191	55 (29 %)	72 (38 %)
Philosophical Beliefs^b			
Polytheism not mentioned	296	78 (26 %)	98 (33 %)
Polytheism mentioned	32	4 (13 %)	15 (47 %)
Hindu Practices^c			
Stereotypes not mentioned	135	21 (16 %)	37 (27 %)
Stereotypes mentioned	193	61 (32 %)	76 (39 %)

a. There were up to 6 statements about caste that a student could select having been taught in class. Each one adds one point for a maximum of 6; a 7th ("None of the below") results in a score of zero.

b. For the question "Which of the following statements about Hindu philosophy were you taught in school?", selecting "Hinduism is a polytheistic religion." as at least one response.

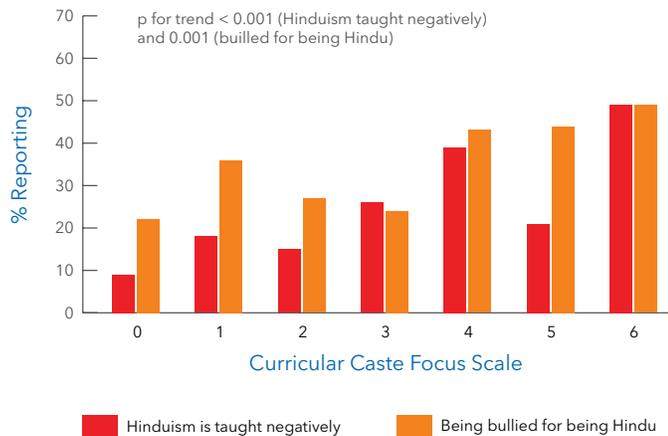
c. For the question "Which of the following statements about Hindu religious practice were you taught in school?", selecting any one of the following "Hindus worship idols.", "Most Hindus do not believe in dating and will get an arranged marriage.", or "Hindus worship the cow as a sacred animal."

OUTCOME

We assessed two primary outcomes. The first, an intermediate outcome, was based on Q14, “My school’s Hinduism unit has given me a more negative view of Hinduism.” Agreeing or strongly agreeing meant that “Hinduism was Taught Negatively” (HTN).

The second, more important outcome was based on the Q19, “Have you ever been bullied because of your Hindu faith?” An affirmative response was classified as “bullied for being of the Hindu faith” (BBH).

FIGURE: CURRICULAR CASTE FOCUS SCALE AND OUTCOMES



For students with BBH, we had also asked students why they felt they had been bullied (Q29); we determined if they had responded “(because) I don’t believe the same thing my peers do” (response a), “They think I am not going to heaven” (response b), and/or “(because) I am a minority” (response c).

STATISTICAL APPROACH

We analyzed the question of whether the CCFS or other covariates were correlated either with HTN or BBH in both univariate and multivariate analyses using both routine and ordinal logistic regression. In addition, we conducted nonparametric tests for trend for the impact of the curricular caste focus scale on both outcomes. We also examined whether HTN might perhaps be a mediator of the relationship between curricular caste focus and this bullying, i.e. do students whose school focuses more

intensely on caste go on to be bullied for their faith partly because an intense CCFS inculcates a damaging view of their religion that becomes fodder for bullying?

P values ≤ 0.05 were considered statistically significant. All analyses were conducted in Stata. See Table 2 (page 4).

Results

Our sample consisted of 334 surveyed students, of whom one did not identify as Hindu and was excluded. The descriptive components of this sample are noted in Table 1. Almost 90% of students were from public schools. Fifty five percent were male; 58% were 10th, 11th, or 12th graders. Approximately 10% recalled hearing about polytheism in school, and 59% recalled hearing stereotypes about idol-worship, cow-worship, and arranged marriages. 25% perceived that Hinduism was taught negatively in their school, and 34% felt they were bullied for their Hindu faith. 77% of students reported a curricular caste focus score (CCFS) of one or more. Cross tabs in Table 1 with the two outcomes provide raw numbers.

In plotting the effect of increments on the curricular caste focus scale against both outcomes, we found evidence of a potentially strong dose response relationship in both cases with a p value for trend that was < 0.001 (HTN) and 0.001 (BBH) (Figure).

LOGISTIC MODELS

Both routine and ordinal logistic regression results were similar; only the former are presented for ease of interpretation. In both unadjusted and adjusted analyses, the CCFS was strongly predictive of both HTN (Table 2) and BBH (Table 3). In adjusted analyses, from a score of zero to a score of 6, each additional curricular caste focus point increased a student’s odds of HTN (odds ratio [OR] 1.27; 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.10-1.48; p value = 0.002) and BBH (OR 1.17, 95% CI 1.03-1.34, p value = 0.015). After adjustment, the CCFS was the only statistically significant predictor of both outcomes.

TABLE 2: “MY SCHOOL’S HINDUISM UNIT HAS GIVEN ME A MORE NEGATIVE VIEW OF HINDUISM.”

PREDICTOR	UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS OR (95% CI)	P-VALUE	MULTIVARIABLE ANALYSIS* OR (95% CI)	P-VALUE
Curricular Caste Focus Scale^a				
Curricular Caste Focus Scale ^a	1.34 (1.18 - 1.53)	<0.001	1.27 (1.10 - 1.48)	0.002
Public School Student ^b	1.09 (0.47 - 2.52)	0.834	0.71 (0.29 - 1.78)	0.468
Male Gender ^c	0.76 (0.46 - 1.25)	0.276	0.87 (0.51 - 1.49)	0.618
Tenth or Higher Grade Level ^d	1.65 (0.97 - 2.78)	0.062	1.28 (0.73 - 2.25)	0.391
Polytheism mentioned as Philosophical Belief ^e	0.40 (0.14 - 1.17)	0.095	0.41 (0.14 - 1.24)	0.116
Stereotypes about Hindu Practice ^f	2.51 (1.44 - 4.37)	0.001	1.67 (0.91 - 3.06)	0.096

*all listed variables included

- a. There were up to 6 statements about caste that a student could select having been taught in class. Each one adds one point for a maximum of 6; a 7th (“None of the below”) results in a score of zero.
- b. vs. Private, Homeschooled or other.
- c. vs. “Female”, “Other”, or “Prefer not to say”
- d. vs. 6th-9th graders
- e. For the question “Which of the following statements about Hindu philosophy were you taught in school?”, selecting “Hinduism is a polytheistic religion.” as at least one response.
- f. For the question “Which of the following statements about Hindu religious practice were you taught in school?”, selecting any one of the following “Hindus worship idols.”, “Most Hindus do not believe in dating and will get an arranged marriage.”, or “Hindus worship the cow as a sacred animal.”

MEDIATION ANALYSIS

We postulated that in order for an intense focus on caste in the classroom to lead to BBH, it would require painting the child’s beliefs, values, and traditions negatively. We do not have the data on how Hinduism is perceived by American students as a whole, but by using one of our outcomes--whether Hindu children perceive HTN--we sought to assess whether HTN might be mediating the relationship between the curricular caste focus and bullying for being Hindu. When we included HTN as a predictor in our regression model for bullying, it was an extremely strong predictor of bullying (OR 3.70, 95% CI 2.13-6.43, p value<0.001), and mitigated the effect of the CCFS to the point it was no longer significant (OR 1.12, 95% CI 0.98-1.28, p value = 0.11; Table 4). Perceptions that Hindus were polytheistic became significantly predictive of BBH once the HTN term was included.

MISCELLANEOUS

When asked why they felt they had been bullied (n=113), 56% believed it was because they had different beliefs, 27% because their peers did not believe they were going to heaven, and 57% because they were the minority. Comparing just the first and last of these, we found that of those bullied, 41% felt it was due to their different beliefs and their being minorities, 16% felt it was due to their different beliefs but not necessarily being a minority, and 17% felt it was due to being minorities but not necessarily due to different beliefs. 27% did not feel it was necessarily due to either.

TABLE 3: "HAVE YOU EVER BEEN BULLIED BECAUSE OF YOUR HINDU FAITH?"

PREDICTOR	UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS OR (95% CI)	P-VALUE	MULTIVARIABLE ANALYSIS* OR (95% CI)	P-VALUE
Curricular Caste Focus Scale^a				
Curricular Caste Focus Scale ^a	1.21 (1.08 - 1.36)	0.001	1.17 (1.03 - 1.34)	0.015
Public School Student ^b	1.81 (0.79 - 4.13)	0.162	1.53 (0.64 - 3.65)	0.343
Male Gender ^c	1.04 (0.66 - 1.64)	0.881	1.15 (0.71 - 1.86)	0.574
Tenth or Higher Grade Level ^d	1.42 (0.89 - 2.26)	0.145	1.14 (0.69 - 1.88)	0.603
Polytheism mentioned as Philosophical Belief ^e	1.78 (0.85 - 3.72)	0.123	2.05 (0.95 - 4.39)	0.066
Stereotypes about Hindu Practice ^f	1.72 (1.07 - 2.77)	0.025	1.35 (0.80 - 2.28)	0.262

*all listed variables included

- a. There were up to 6 statements about caste that a student could select having been taught in class. Each one adds one point for a maximum of 6; a 7th ("None of the below") results in a score of zero.
- b. vs. Private, Homeschooled or other.
- c. vs. "Female", "Other", or "Prefer not to say"
- d. vs. 6th-9th graders

- e. For the question "Which of the following statements about Hindu philosophy were you taught in school?"; selecting "Hinduism is a polytheistic religion." as at least one response.
- f. For the question "Which of the following statements about Hindu religious practice were you taught in school?"; selecting any one of the following "Hindus worship idols.", "Most Hindus do not believe in dating and will get an arranged marriage.", or "Hindus worship the cow as a sacred animal."

TABLE 4: INCLUDING "NEGATIVE VIEW OF HINDUISM TAUGHT IN SCHOOL" AS A MEDIATOR

PREDICTOR	MULTIVARIABLE ANALYSIS* OR (95% CI)	P-VALUE
Curricular Caste Focus Scale^a		
Curricular Caste Focus Scale ^a	1.12 (0.98 - 1.28)	0.105
Public School Student ^b	1.70 (0.69 - 4.19)	0.249
Male Gender ^c	1.19 (0.72 - 1.97)	0.486
Tenth or Higher Grade Level ^d	1.08 (0.65 - 1.81)	0.761
Polytheism mentioned as Philosophical Belief ^e	2.56 (1.17 - 5.62)	0.019
Stereotypes about Hindu Practice ^f	1.22 (0.71 - 2.10)	0.481
School gave a negative view of Hinduism ^g	3.70 (2.13 - 6.43)	<0.001

- a. There were up to 6 statements about caste that a student could select having been taught in class. Each one adds one point for a maximum of 6; a 7th ("None of the below") results in a score of zero.
- b. vs. Private, Homeschooled or other.
- c. vs. "Female", "Other", or "Prefer not to say"
- d. vs. 6th-9th graders
- e. For the question "Which of the following statements about Hindu philosophy were you taught in school?"; selecting "Hinduism is a polytheistic religion." as at least one response.
- f. For the question "Which of the following statements about Hindu religious practice were you taught in school?"; selecting any one of the following "Hindus worship idols.", "Most Hindus do not believe in dating and will get an arranged marriage.", or "Hindus worship the cow as a sacred animal."
- g. This is the outcome for table 2, included as a predictor here.

Discussion

In this secondary analysis of our survey data, we found strong evidence among our survey respondents for a correlation between the intensity with which a school's Hinduism unit focuses on caste and the likelihood both that the child will perceive that Hinduism has been taught negatively and that she/he will be bullied for her/his faith, potentially with the former mediating the relationship with the latter. The teaching of caste in classrooms may thus be a potentially powerful cause of faith-based bullying for Hindu children.

Returning to the prompt that triggered this secondary analysis, it appears that Americans as a whole may be bullying Hindu Americans partly from a position of careless, partial ignorance—because Hindu Americans' beliefs are generically other—but also from a position of decontextualized “knowledge”, where Hindus are worthy of bullying because they “believe in” the caste system and in turn discriminate against others. These two possibilities exist on a continuum and are of course not mutually exclusive. But the distinction matters, because the two possibilities suggest different remedies. If generic “othering” is the primary issue, then interpersonal and interfaith dialogue would be effective vehicles for recourse. If on the other hand an intense curricular focus on caste creates and reinforces a view of Hindu beliefs as uniquely repellent, it is the curriculum itself that needs to be reexamined. Interfaith dialogue cannot alone and for all future citizens undue the official story that has become, and continues to become, the basis for a collective civic memory and justification for discrimination.

Students answered almost identically, percentage wise, regarding the self-perceived reason for bullying being different beliefs vs. being minorities, with a fair amount of overlap but with important segments choosing one or the other. This question could not be introduced in our regression for BBH because it was only asked if the student affirmed bullying in the first place, and thus was collinear with this outcome. In future surveys, we will try to ask these questions differently to better tease out generic and more specific self-perceived discrimination, both of which do seem to be in evidence here.

Polytheism—long a potential area of difference between Hindus and non-Hindus in America—is not predictive until HTN is introduced into our model at which point it strongly predicts bullying. The numbers in the various groups are quite small (just four individuals who read about polytheism who did not perceive HTN).

Our study has important limitations. It is a convenience sample that cannot be statistically extrapolated to Hindu children nationwide; any conclusions must be restricted to the sample at hand. We cannot control for the selection bias of children with certain experiences being more likely to respond to the survey, nor can we independently confirm the experiences of bullying, curricular focus, and general perception we asked students to recall. It is very likely there are confounders we were unable to measure in our study that might impact both perceptions of caste being taught in school and being bullied for Hinduism, including teacher biases, the influence of popular culture, and more. Our study has several strengths: a staged question design and implementation process, straightforward and transparent methodology, and a large sample size given the subject. We hope this is not the last survey of Hindu children in America; we also hope that the next survey will provide happier news.

In summary, we reexamined our survey data at the suggestion of the Sikh Coalition and found that surveyed Hindu students' perceptions of faith-based bullying was indeed tightly correlated to their perception of the focus on caste in their Hinduism curriculum, potentially mediated by a perception that their religion was being taught negatively. We hope this result will give pause both to those who think generic interfaith dialogue alone will help Hindus feel safer and more integrated into their communities, and to those who insist on tying Hinduism as tightly to caste as possible for their own unrelated curricular ends. Hindu children deserve better.