Attitudes on Wealth Inequality

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Introduction

The Socio Economic Status or SES is defined as how someone views themself relative to how much money they acquire, their education, and their race (Manstead, 2018). An array of scholarly articles have been written that detail SES and its effect on behavior, based on a person's position on the socioeconomic pyramid. Working class people and people of the lower class scored much higher in empathy and are more likely to help those in distress. (Manstead, 2018). Social class differences in college attendance has also become a major issue. Middle-class norms of independence are prevalent in universities and prestigious workplaces which causes middle-class families to not enroll their children in university (Manstead, 2018). In fact, seventy-nine percent of those who grew up in the upper-class tier were standard enrollees in college (National Communication Society, 2019). Whereas only thirty-two percent of children in lower-class tier were standard enrollees (NCS, 2019). When there are more people from an upper-class part of society enrolled in universities then there might be varying opinions on wealth.

Kevin Blair, a professor at Niagara University states that students who enroll in a variety of classes that teach about poverty are more likely to have a more refined understanding of wealth inequality (McDonald, 2014). For this very reason, more research should be done on what exactly makes a person more or less empathetic towards people of lower class. More research should be done on why a person of working/lower-class might feel more resentment towards people much above them in the SES hierarchy.

Relevance to Political Science

As prior research has stated, those enrolled in college tend to emphasize attitudes of higher emotional intelligence (Manstead, 2018). Liberalizing effects of a university education have been attributed to the effects of exposure to diverse ideas which may foster tolerance of different perspectives and a reconsideration of conventional beliefs (Mintz, n.d). In terms of socio economic status, those with higher emotional intelligence will empathize more with those who identify as lower and worker class. This emotional intelligence can translate into public policy as well. On an aggregate level, people who are more understanding of other people's economic development will more than likely agree with politicians that support the working/lower class. This issue on economic inequality also translates to how people vote in the primaries/caucuses. If people have a strong understanding of economic inequality they will focus their attention on how a presidential nominee will address those issues (Horowitz et al, 2020). People who are more educated on a variety of topics tend to also vote in higher numbers (cbs, 2017).

Theory

A Pew Research study was conducted comparing attitudes between republicans and democrats on a multitude of different economic issues. Six-in-ten U.S adults say there's too much economic inequality in the country currently, among the group selected, most would want a candidate to propose changes within the economic system (Horowitz et al, 2020). Compared to other issues, reducing economic inequality does not rank high on the list of the public's priorities for the federal government to address (Horowitz et al, 2020). Democrats are twice as likely than republicans to say there is too much economic inequality (Horowitz et al, 2020). Since college students are more likely to vote for a democratic candidate on an aggregate level, the topic that democrats are more likely to support candidates that addresses inequalities sparked my curiosity

(Parker, 2019). For research, I wanted to expand on the ideas that college students might be more inclined to support topics of income inequality and take an empathetic tone towards those of lower class.

Hypotheses Phase I and II

For Phase I, there are three hypotheses that I have developed from the original research explained in previous sections. Phase I refers to my data analysis on the point system, which will be explained in further detail in the "data analysis" section.

The first hypothesis (H1) is that college students will be more inclined to answer the questions that support poor people being disadvantaged. The second hypothesis (H2) is that people who are not enrolled in college will be less inclined to answer the questions that support poor people and their disadvantages. Finally, my third hypothesis (H3) is that the means of the two groups will be different in terms of points. The phrase "groups" refers to college enrolled people and non college enrolled people. As stated, people who are in college tend to vote for Democratic candidates so therefore, their answers should be closer to favor changes to benefit lower-class people.

Methods for Phase I & II

The independent variables include two groups: those enrolled in college and those who are not. The dependent variable for Phase I is the attitudes on wealth based on the accruement of points. Phase II's dependent variable is slightly different because it excludes the total points accrued and focuses on a person's attitude on wealthy people. Phase I's dependent variable is weaker than Phase II dependent variable because it generalizes the points that are accrued.

Survey Questions

There were a total of five demographic questions which consisted of gender, college student, ideology, party identification, and family's annual income. There are a total of seven questions that measure attitudes on disadvantage/wealth. These seven questions ask to completely disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, somewhat agree, and completely agree to controversial statements.

These statements include: "Wealthy people work harder than poor people", "Poor people do not work as hard as others", "Rich people had more advantages in life than most others", "Poor people faced more obstacles than most others", "Large companies should pay more in taxes." I also included general public policy questions which include: "Taxes should be….", "People who have amassed a billion dollars in income are….." The six questions were then placed into a point system where the responses range from 1-6 points. One being completely disagree and seven being completely agree. I added up all of the responses and divided them by seven. This gives me the average response rate for this section.

Finally, the surveys were distributed using Amazon Web Services (AWS). Under AWS the filters "United States" "Politics" and "College Student" were selected. Respondents were able to find my survey using these filters. To reach the respondents, I allotted $0.05 for each respondent to take the survey.

Demographics of my sample

To find out the demographics, I took the sample of 256 respondents and found the median for each of the categories under the demographic section. 40 of the 256 were within my network of people, which includes school, family, friends, etc. 216 respondents were from AWS. The typical respondent is a male, 25 years old and older, not enrolled in college, family made between $50,001-$100,000 in annual income, a

democrat, and lean conservative. Of the 256 respondents, 111 were college students while 145 were not college students. Since there are slightly more non-enrolled college respondents, the sample may not be representative of the true difference of both group's means. In addition, the sample was completely randomized using AWS however 40 of the respondents from my personal circle of people were convenient. Opinions on every question were the same in the two groups (See Table. 1) except for opinions on a poor person's work ethic. People who are not in college seem to not have an opinion on whether poor people do not work as hard.

In order to test my hypotheses, I ran two sample tests just for Phase I. The null hypothesis for the two sample tests is the mean of points between college and non college are equal. The alternative is the mean of points between college and non college respondents are not equal. I wanted to test if the two means of the points were different based on the two groups. I used a ninety five percent level of significance and a critical value of plus/minus 1.96. After running the Two Sample Test, I found that the p-value is 0.1179 which is not significant enough to make conclusions (See Table 2). Based on this, I fail to reject the null hypothesis that the two means are equal. The two means result in inconclusive tests.

Phase II: Hypothesis and Correlation Test

Since the comparison of two means based on the point system yielded inconclusive results, I decided to narrow the two groups down into one question. The specific question I chose was "Wealthy people work harder than others." I wanted to see if their response to the question is dependent on their enrollment in college. I chose this question because I feel as if this is the best measure of the true attitude on wealth. People's opinions on how wealthy people become wealthy is much more polarizing than

how a poor person is poor. The null hypothesis is there is no correlation between the college/non college student and the response to the question.The alternative hypothesis is there is an indicated correlation between the college/non-college respondents and their responses to the questions. After running a Pearson's correlation test, the p-value came out to 0.02135 which is less than 0.05. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we can safely reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a correlation. The correlation is -0.1438 indicating a weak negative correlation. Meaning that a non-college respondent tends to disagree more with the statement that "Wealthy people work harder than poor people." Table 3 in the index section shows how many respondents disagreed more with this statement. Although I could not test the phrase "Poor people do not work as hard," table 4 shows how most college and non college students agree with this statement.

Discussion

The point system for my dependent variable did not yield the results that were statistically significant in Phase I. This may be because the point system did not give a very accurate idea of how a person might feel towards certain topics such as billionaires and people of lower classes. The point system just averaged out how they felt in the seven attitudes questions asked. Therefore, Phase I with the point system did not support or deny my hypotheses due to the insufficient testing. However, Phase II created much different results. As seen, The p-value was lower than 0.05 level of significance which meant the two variables are significant and the probability of observing the alternative hypothesis is 95%. Furthermore, a negative correlation was drawn from the two variables.

As stated, my hypotheses claim that college students might be more inclined to take a more empathetic attitude towards those of lower class. Meanwhile non college respondents might take a less empathetic tone towards those of a lower class. The Pearson's correlation and several graphs indicate that college students do not have a more empathetic tone towards those in the lower socioeconomic class. The correlation tests therefore disprove my theory. However, the reason why the two groups are so similar in opinions is because most people in the US might not know the entire magnitude of what poor people have to go through. Particularly in the statement where most people agreed that "Poor people do not work as hard," most people may not understand that poor people often work multiple jobs to make ends meet. However, I analyzed the select group of people that made $125,000 and up and the median attitude on the prompt "Poor people had more obstacles in life" was strongly agreed. In addition, I also analyzed people that made between $0-$25,000 based on their opinions on "Poor people had more obstacles in life" and they somewhat agreed as well. Therefore, I think on an aggregate level, college respondents are no more empathetic towards those of lower income as non-college respondents. But as I looked at respondents of higher and lower wealth, they tended to be more empathetic towards those of lower classes. It is hard to generalize certain members of society because there are so many confounding variables that play into how a person feels about upper and lower classes.

Conclusion

Overall, I developed a strong understanding of how to make surveys, distribute them in an effective manner, and how to analyze certain groups. This project was a great stepping stone for my career in data analytics and survey research. This project in particular showed me that empathy is often not supposed to be placed in certain groups

over others. The stereotype that non-college respondents do not have the education to be empathetic towards others is completely false based on this project. Oftentimes research supports college people becoming more knowledgeable about the world around them, which transfers into empathy towards minority groups. As I have seen with this survey, college people are not more empathetic than their non college counterparts. This project surprised me in many ways based on the stereotype that I have developed since being in college.

A way I can improve this study is to get more respondents from other areas besides AWS. I felt like these respondents could have been biased by the promise of $0.05 at the completion of the survey. Although the survey was not long, I feel as if a respondent may have been disengaged with the topic because all they wanted was the money at the end of the survey. I think another weakness I faced was the point system. Due to the points being an average of the seven questions asked, the points could not accurately reflect a person's true opinion. An example is someone may have strongly agreed with one question and completely disagreed with another question meanwhile their accrued points would still be in the middle (1+7/2=4). In addition, The United State's attitude on wealthy versus poor could also be a huge factor in potential biases. We often have certain stereotypes that are tied with certain levels of socioeconomic status. An example is poor people who do not work as hard as others. It is hard to break stereotypes especially when those stereotypes have been so engraved in our culture. We as a society often see poor people as people that abuse welfare however in a lot of cases this is not true. I think studying college versus non college respondents was a decently good idea however I wish I broke the groups down into their socioeconomic status from the beginning. I think it would be interesting to study rich versus poor college students

and rich versus poor non college respondents. In addition, I think studying the party and ideology could also be helpful in potentially strengthening my argument. Overall, this project taught me so much about the world around me.

Index

Table 1.)

Opinion:	College Students	Non College Students
Taxes	Higher	Higher
Large Company Benefits	Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree
Billionaire	Good for country	Good for country
Wealthy Work	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Agree
Poor Work	Somewhat agree	Neutral
Rich Advantages	Somewhat agree	Somewhat Agree
Poor Obstacles	Somewhat agree	Somewhat Agree

Table 2.)

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        Welch Two Sample t-test

data:  non.collegestudent$score and college.student$score
t = -1.3464, df = 243.28, p-value = 0.1794
alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval:
 -0.18973505  0.03566768
sample estimates:
mean of x mean of y
 3.390148  3.467181
```

Table 3.)

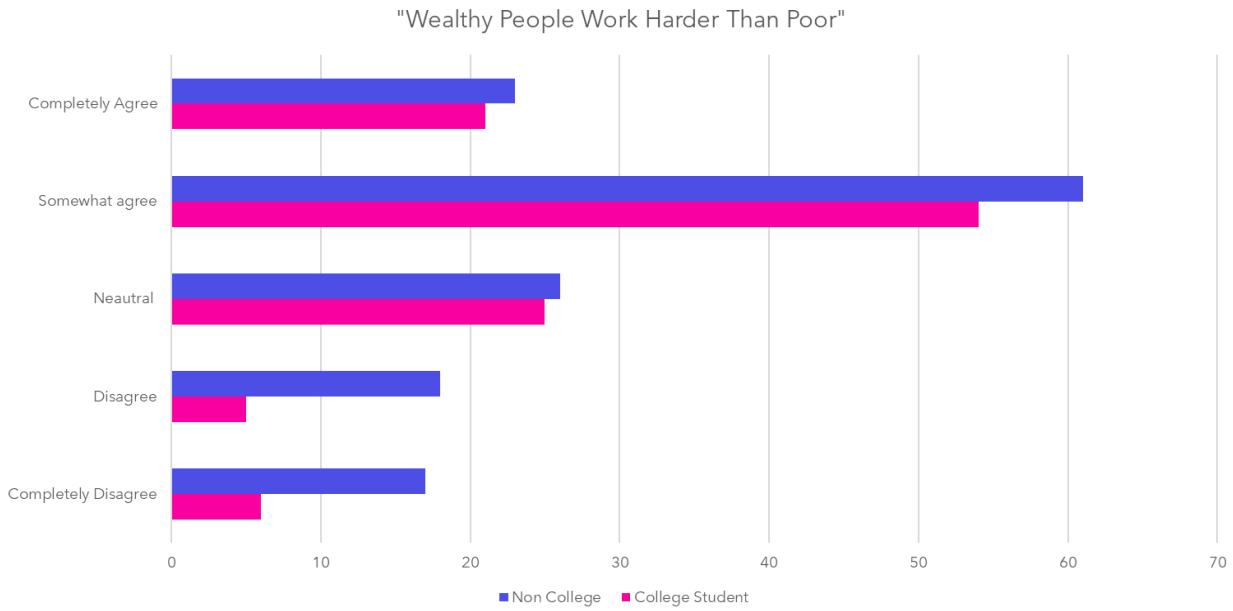


Table 4.)

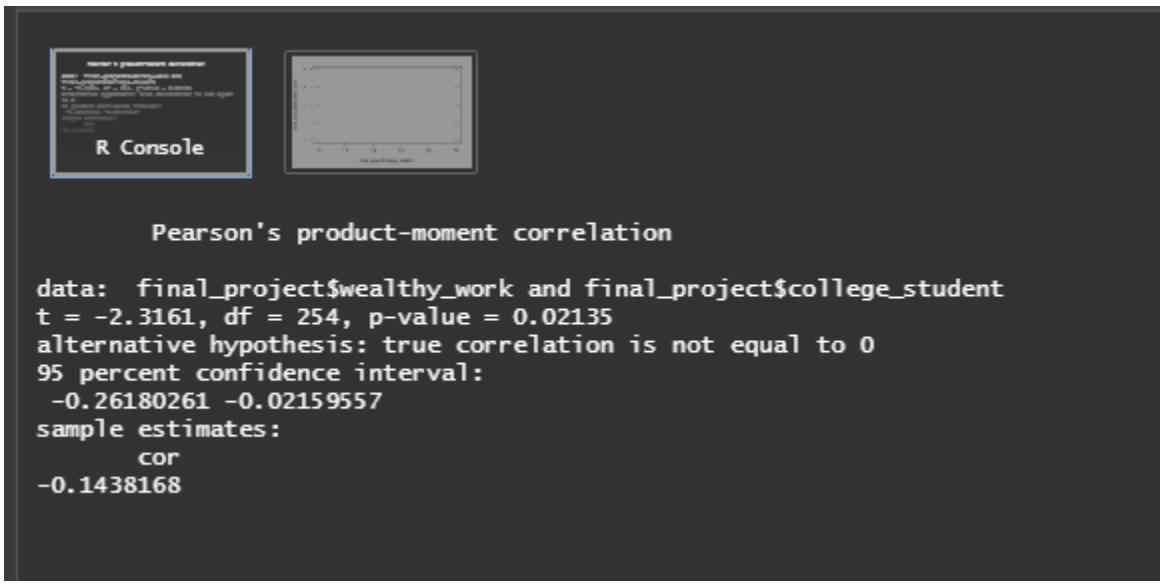
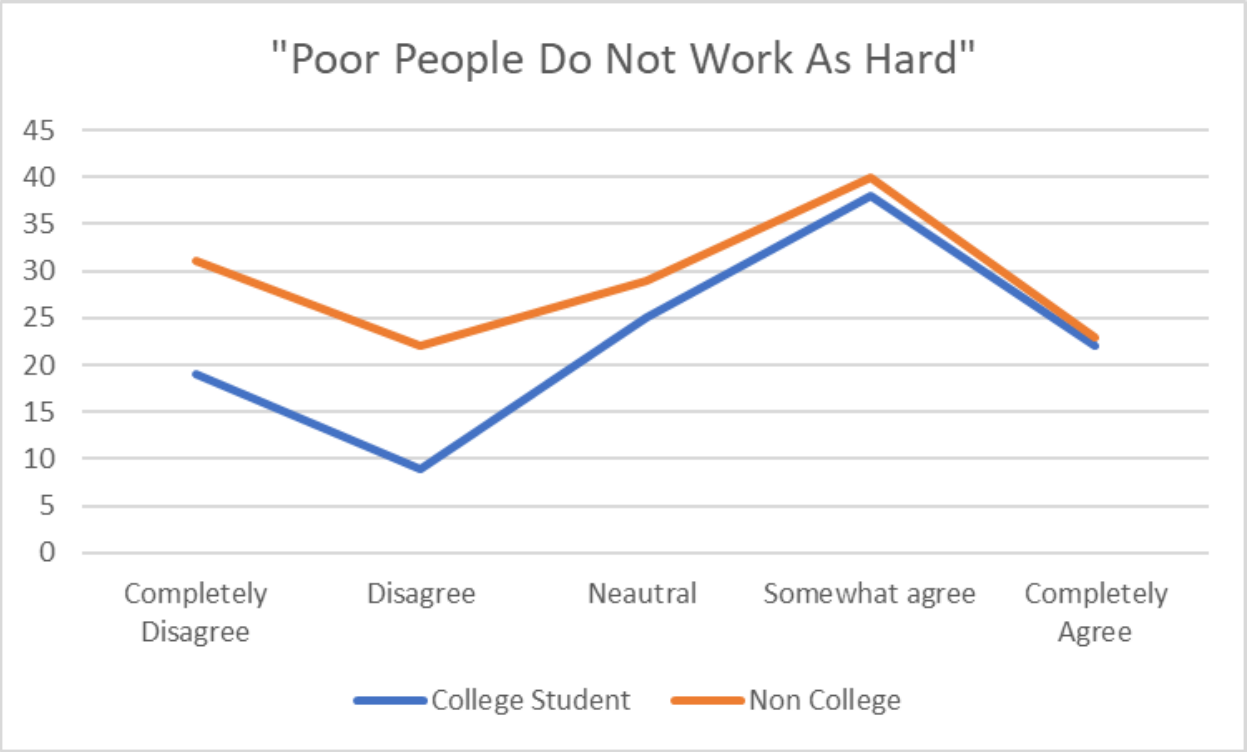


Table 5.)


"Poor People Do Not Work As Hard"
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Completely Disagree
Disagree
Neautral
Somewhat agree
Completely Agree
College Student
Non College

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