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*Synthesis Essay Draft*

Language and literacy discrimination is one of the most overlooked forms of inequality in today's society. People are very commonly judged not by what they say, but how they say it, and this discrimination occurs based on accent, dialect, and most proficiently, not conforming under the social norm of "standard English". Language and literacy discrimination does not only affect people at surface level in just social settings, language and literacy discrimination has serious consequences in how individuals view themselves and treat themselves, affecting how they see their identity as well as how others see their identity. Being discrimination based on language and literacy, being mocked, mistreated, and dismissed, can have a strong and devastating effect on individuals and how they develop their future language and literacy, as well as their mental health and how they view themselves. Through the examination of what language and literacy discrimination is, personal experience of language and literacy discrimination, and studies of the effects of language and literacy discrimination, language and literacy discrimination will be uncovered in how it affects personal development and mental health of the individuals experiencing this discrimination.

Language and literacy discrimination is an extremely normalized form of inequality and discrimination that a majority of individuals are not able to recognize when it occurs. Before taking English 110 at The City College Of New York, I did not truly perceive nor understand language and literacy discrimination and how often it occurs in our society. The main question that many people ask is; what exactly is language and literacy discrimination? Language and literary discrimination is a form of discrimination that involves the judgement, mistreatment, and

dismissal of individuals based on their form of communication, the way that the individual reads, writes, and most important, speaks. (Legal Aid At Work pg 1) The heart of language and literacy discrimination involves discrimination based on accent, dialect, different versions of grammar, and not conforming under the made up ideal of “standard English”. Language and literacy discrimination is a resultant of many other forms of discrimination, such as racial discrimination and class discrimination. People are commonly judged first based on their racial identity and class identity, mainly based on first looks and first impression, leading to discriminating views and eventually being discriminated against based on their version of communication. Individuals who are experiencing language and literacy discrimination in any social setting are often considered as uneducated and unintelligent because of their accent, dialect, and overall way of communicating that does not fall under the fictional “standard English”. (Young pg 62)

Language and literacy mainly begins during childhood education, occurring in a majority of classrooms but mainly beginning in a version of English or a type of writing class. Young individuals are told, from the beginning, that their version of communication, either accent, dialect, or form of communication, is incorrect because it does not fall under the category of “standard English” that is forced upon these students. Often, teachers dismiss and attempt to correct student’s forms of communication, pushing aside the value of different accents and different dialects that allow the classroom to have a variety of different perspectives that cause growth. Language and literacy discrimination immensely impacts the development of language and literacy in individuals by placing strict and undefined regulations on writing in “standard English”, defining false views onto individuals who are not placed in the category of speaking “standard English” which affects their development, how individuals view themselves, and the mental well being of these individuals.

Language and literacy discrimination is an underlying issue in society that is pushed under the rug in a majority of situations and not being placed under the category of standard discrimination. This issue of language and literacy discrimination is not foreign to my family. My grandmother, an Italian immigrant who came to the United States in 1952, experienced a plethora of language and literacy discrimination that affected how she viewed herself and her mental health when adapting to society and the language and literacy norms that were in practice. From the beginning of her time in Brooklyn, she and her parents were experiencing language and literacy discrimination in their daily lives, occurring during simple activities like grocery shopping, signing up for healthcare and attending doctors appointments, and even receiving hostile looks while speaking Italian in public. In my discussion with my grandmother about her experiences of language and literacy discrimination, one of her stories that profoundly stood out to me is her experiences during her first year of elementary school in the United States. Starting in first grade, my grandmother began her schooling, not knowing a lick of English, and was placed into a standard classroom with all students who are fluent in English. She did not receive any English assistance, no outside help from an English teacher and no one to translate the subjects so she could understand and learn. The lack of help began to make her feel isolated from the rest of the class, and the bullying and berating began upon her from the other students and even the teacher, yelling at my grandmother for not understanding and not doing the work exactly how the teacher wanted it done. This language and literacy discrimination began to break her down piece by piece and day by day, affecting her language and literacy development, her mental health, and the way that she viewed herself while learning and eventually communicating with others in her neighborhood. My grandmother became isolated, leaving her out of friend groups and other social gatherings that would improve her language and literacy, and ultimately

hinder language and literacy growth causing her to negatively view herself when communicating with others. She became self conscious of every little act of language and literacy, putting her in an infinitely deep rabbit hole of overthinking and nervousness that impeded her development in language and literacy, as a person, and her mental health in her new environment of the United States.

Language and literacy discrimination merely acts on individuals at surface level, however, it digs deep into the mind of individuals experiencing this discrimination. Language and literacy discrimination deeply affects human development by placing barriers for individuals to learn, to communicate amongst their peers, and to actively participate in society. Individuals are strongly judged by the way that they use language and literacy, being excluded from society and ultimately damaging their personal confidence, restricting significant life aspects like education, health, and work, and breaking down their emotional well being. Individuals experience two types of language and literacy discrimination, ethnic accent bullying, which is beratement and exclusion based on accent and pronunciation, and linguistic stereotyping, pre-determined judgements about the individuals language and literacy based on looks. (Dovchin pg 3) Individuals experience an inferior complex, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and social anxiety disorders due to experiencing language and literacy discrimination. (Dovchin pg 9) Students in higher education whose writing style opposes the established “standard English” norms lack access to forms of language and literacy support, resulting in lower grades for the students and ultimately damaging their academic and psychological growth (Page pg 41)

Language and literacy discrimination additionally becomes a gatekeeping tool for students of various ethnicities with strong and deep linguistic identities, leading to individuals intentionally avoiding participation and isolating themselves. Instead of using the deep ethnic backgrounds

influential linguistic identities of individuals to create a more diverse community and to understand different perspectives, individuals experiencing language and literacy discrimination are forced to keep to themselves and restrict themselves from breaking the ice and becoming an actively participating member of society. Students and individuals are restricted on their language and literacy growth by the continuous push back that they experience from not writing in “standard English”, producing a lack of development in language and literacy which displaces these individuals far behind from the rest of society. Individuals experience blockades in their development as members in society, both socially and individually, by being forced to withhold their language and literacy due to it not conforming under the false ideal of “standard English”.

On top of language and literacy discrimination having an immensely negative effect on individuals, language and literacy discrimination takes a deep toll on the mental health and well being of individuals constantly experiencing this discrimination in their day to day lives. The mental health and emotional well being are deeply affected through language and literacy discrimination, as the psychological consequences that await this discrimination strongly impact the way individuals view themselves and socially interact in the world. Individuals experiencing language and literacy discrimination feel daily psychological pressure to change the way they speak and the way that they communicate to blend into the established social norms of “standard English”. (McCluney) Individuals, mainly African American and Spanish individuals, have to continuously put on a mask and code switch, changing language, dialect, and speech style, to blend into society, often leading to mental exhaustion and strain on the mind. (McCluney)

According to authors Michael Spencer and Juan Chen of “*Effect of Discrimination on Mental Health Service Utilization Among Chinese Americans*”, Chinese individuals in the United States experiencing language and literacy discrimination experienced increased amounts of stress and

strong fears or being judged by essential workers, often leading to discouragement in seeking mental health support and health support as a whole. (Spencer & Chen) Language and literacy discrimination not only harms the well being of individuals by additionally prevents mental health assistance and access to health care, leaving language and literacy discrimination to continuously attack the identity of individuals who experience it every single day.

Language and literacy discrimination is vastly larger than just discrimination of communication, language and literacy discrimination targets individuals at their weakest points and breaks down their identity, social confidence, mental health, and their family roots. Individuals who do not conform their language and literacy under the false ideal of “standard English” are often excluded, dismissed, and disrespected, deeply affecting their development as people and their daily mental health. Language and literacy discrimination, experienced by my grandmother and was a core part of her struggle growing up as an immigrant in the United States, silences cultural expression that we should embrace rather than push aside because society needs a multitude of perspectives that allow us to be a strong melting pot of all people living simultaneously in harmony.

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