

The final Cito test and its folds

An analysis of the different active roles that the final Cito test possesses by unfolding the document.

Abstract

In the Netherlands the final Cito test is an educational standardized test that is used to categorize children, aged eleven to twelve, in a learning path for high school. The final Cito test is disseminated as a tool to objectively measure one's intelligence which can, among other things, lead to self-doubt and stereotyping. This is why the active roles of this test have been investigated in this research by unfolding the final Cito test. This research takes into account the history of the final Cito test, to further understand its consequences in the here and now. To understand the relation between the traces of its past in the present, documentaries and websites have been watched and the final Cito test as document has been analysed. During the process of analysing, palpable traces became visible which led to ten conversations with and twenty messages of people who were convinced that the final Cito test can have long term influences on one's sense of self. This research has attempted to unfold the final Cito test, which shows that the portrayal of the final Cito test, as an objective tool to measure one's intelligence, can be harmful for one's sense of self. Therefore, this research aimed to provide a platform for a new vision on the use of standardized test within education.

Keywords: *categorisation; cito; education; folded object; standardized tests*

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1. Introduction

The final Cito test is a standardized test that is taken at the end of primary school and decides, for the majority of Dutch children aged eleven to twelve, which learning path they will follow in high school. I still remember the feeling I had when making and receiving the score of this test; I felt extremely nervous and felt that the opportunities that I would have in life were depended on this test. During my further educational career, I have always carried this experience with me. For a long time, I did not interlink this experience to other aspects in my life. This changed when I watched an episode about the educational system of the documentary series 'Tussen Meten en Weten' by philosopher Jan Bor (2017). This episode shows how education is increasingly getting quantified by the use of standardized tests. Seeing this made me realize that my experience with the final Cito test is connected to the dissemination of the idea that the final Cito test is an objective tool to measure one's intelligence (Heij, 2021). In the conceptualization of this idea environmental factors, which may vary from personal problems to structural inequalities, are not taking into to account.

After watching the documentary, I realized that the final Cito test is not only a document with content but also a document with agency and therefore has a social configuration (Prior, 2008). This means that the final Cito test has an obvious active role as a decisionmaker, because the final Cito score decides the learning path that a child will follow in high school. In this research the less obvious, active roles of the final Cito test are explored by approaching it as a folded object. A folded object is a concept introduced by M'Charek (2014) in which the historicity and multi-temporalities of the object has been taken into account. Documents gather places and time in the process of making and remaking, which potentially still effects the here and now. To unfold the final Cito test, the starting point of this research will be to retrace the first widely used standardized test which was the idea of intelligence quotient (IQ) (Au, 2016). IQ testing was adopted, changed and misappropriated by white American psychologists to 'objectively' measure that white people were the most intelligent. From that point on, standardized test took its rise in the Western world. These kind of power structures are folded into standardized tests which are affecting people's sense of self by the creation and preservation of stereotypes (Eizadirad, 2020).

To explore the relation between the history of standardized tests and the palpable traces that are intertwined in the final Cito test, the following central question will be answered: *How is the underlying idea of the final Cito test, as an objective measurement tool of intelligence, related to one's sense of self?* To answer the central question the following sub question are stated: *How did standardized test emerge and in which way were they modified to what they are today?* By answering this question, the historicity of this document in the process of making and remaking of this test will be unfolded. The agency of the final Cito test will be revealed by answering the following question: *What*

does an analyses of the final Cito test as a document reveal in relation to one's sense self? The broad spectrum of effects that this test produces on one's sense of self will be explored by answering the following question: *What kind of feelings and consequences does a standardized test, such as the final Cito test, evoke?* By answering the last question, the after-effects of this test will be set forth: *How did the final Cito test effect the participants sense of self?*

It is relevant to answer these questions, because research shows that portraying standardized tests as objective and neutral, can be harmful for on one's sense of self (Eizadirad, 2020). In this moment many standardized tests within education, are being used to hierarchically order children without taking into account that these tests were created to expose what is there, which is class and racial inequalities. It is important to acknowledge this to evoke positive change within the educational system and minimize the harmful effects on one's sense of self. In addition, this research could be interesting for other researchers that use data of standardized tests, such as Program for International Student Assessment. The results of this research might produce more insight on the objectivity and therefore generalizability of results of standardized tests within education and on the harmful effects these test can carry with them.

2. Theoretical approach

2.1 The agency of the final Cito test

Within social research, documents are tended to be viewed as sources of evidence and therefore informants with a focus on content (Prior, 2008). With viewing documents in this way an important role of documents is underexposed, namely the active role. Documents can be props, allies, rule-makers, calculators, decisionmakers, experts, leads for new documents etc. It is therefore not enough to view documents as passive. Documents and objects should be conceptualized as actors which have a social configurations (Prior, 2008). Documents are able to drive and shape political, economic, medical and scientific activities. It is therefore important to understand the final Cito test and the new documents that came forth out of this test as actors. The most obvious reason for this is, that the final Cito score fulfils the role of decisionmaker. The score has a big deciding role with regards to which learning path a child will follow in high school and the child's position in the educational system. Additionally, Cito as an institution has an impact on their further educational career, since Cito is a widely used tool to give an "objective insight into the development of each student" (Cito, n.d.).

The exploration of the other active, less obvious, roles of the final Cito test will be done by analyzing this test as a folded object; a concept introduced by M'charek (2014). The historicity of the test will be taken into account by analyzing the final Cito test as a folded object. The final Cito test enacts with his 'invisible' history in the process of making and remaking to what the object is in its

current state. Prior to what the final Cito test is today, it has been changed, manipulated, used for many different purposes, formed with different opinions and interests, which is considered to be the process of making and remaking. By analyzing the final Cito test as a folded object the multi-temporalities that are enacted in this object will be recognized, which entails the following: “An object, a circumstance, is thus polychronic, multi-temporal, and reveals a time that is gathered together, with multiple pleats.” (Serres & Latour, 1995: 60). By unfolding the final Cito test the multi-temporalities of the test become visible again. This provides clarification for what the final Cito test is today and the different forms of agency it possesses.

Analyzing the final Cito test in this way is important, because “Attending to how objects enact time, how their folds keep it, may help to understand the relation between the history of an object and the potential of its politics in the here and now.” (M’charek, 2014: 49). The multi-temporalities that are created by layers of time, which are detectable in the process of making, remaking, folding and crumbling of the document, are creating an absence presence. It is important to explore this absence presence, because it can have as much as an effect as recognizable forms of the presence (Hetherington, 2004). In this research this firstly meant delving into the history of the final Cito test as a standardized test. Secondly, to investigate which folds are still sensible in the here and now by exploring influences on one’s sense of self.

2.2 The first folds of the final Cito test

The starting point in the unfolding of the final Cito test is the first widely accepted standardized test. Alfred Binet, a French psychologist, developed in 1904 the idea of intelligence testing, which was developed to assess if young children had mild developmental disabilities (Au, 2016). This idea was not much later adopted and then changed, misappropriated and distorted by cognitive psychologists in the United States (US) (Au, 2016). Henry Goddard, Lewis Terman, and Robert Yerkes injected their own underlying presumptions about humans and human ability and fit their findings into the race and class politics of the US in the twenties. The idea that IQ was hereditary and fixed established the justification for the use of standardized testing to sorting and ranking of human populations by race, gender, and class according to supposedly inborn, biologically innate intelligence (Au, 2009; Gould, 1996). After the development of the IQ test, standardized testing became very popular because it was providing an ‘objective assessment’ according to the creators (Au, 2016).

In 1917 a Beta Army test was created to categorize the incoming soldiers and determine their mental fitness (Au, 2016). The results concluded that the intelligence of European immigrants could largely be judged by their country of origin. According to the outcome of this biased test, the lighter skinned Northern and Western Europeans were more intelligent than the darker skinned Eastern and

Southern Europeans. African Americans were presumed to be the least intelligent of all people. When these IQ tests were integrated in the educational system in the US, African American educators were aware of the ways in which IQ testing was being used to preserve racial inequalities. Nonetheless standardized testing was seen by the white ruling society as providing an objective measure of intelligence, which gave away the ability of paving the way for white teachers to categorize students and use test scores to deny structural inequalities (Au, 2013). W.E.B. DuBois wrote in 1940 about the technique of psychological tests. He noted that these tests were quickly adjusted to put the Black community absolutely beyond the possibility of civilization using it as a tool to keep racial inequalities in place (Au, 2016).

Not much later standardized tests were implemented within many educational systems in the Western world. After World War Two the Netherlands implemented standardized testing within their educational system to supposedly reduce social segregation within education (Ruijs, 2020). In 1965 the government decided that primary schools needed to prepare their children for high school with a standardized test. Before this, the standardized test was not yet obligatory for pupils who were following 'gymnasium', which was and still to a large extent is occupied by elites (Merry & Boterman, 2020). Adriaan de Groot was the founder of the 'Centraal Instituut voor Toetsontwikkeling' and the creator of the Cito test for which he used the American standardized test as an example (de Groot, 1983). In his book, 'Fives and Sixes', he describes that standardized tests in education are needed to represent the growing trend of individualization and measurability. This assessment approach was supposed to end the homogenized forms of education based on classes within society. By testing children during their educational career there is a tracking system created which according to de Groot (1983) accurately and extensively reflects capabilities of children.

The basis of the final Cito test is thus enacted in firstly the idea to assess if young children had mild developmental issues which was remade to fit into the race and class politics of the US in the twenties from where it took its rise in the Western world (Au, 2016). After the implementation of standardized tests in the educational system in the US it was clear that these tests were used to preserve racial and class inequalities. Nonetheless de Groot (1983) chose to take these standardized tests as the basis for the Cito test. He still used the argument that standardized tests are an objective measurement and provide equal opportunities. Additionally, this argument was substantiated by the growing trend of individualization and measurability within society. The absence of the idea of standardized tests to keep racial and class inequalities in place is still present in 'gymnasium', the top of the educational system in the Netherlands that is mostly occupied by the elite (Merry & Boterman, 2020).

2.3 Standardized tests and its relationship with the sense of self

After the first implementation of the final Cito test within the Dutch educational system a lot has changed, which has impacted the role of the Cito test within education. Although, many traces of the first standardized tests are left behind, which I consider to be forms of absence of the presence. The main objective of standardized tests such as the final Cito test, remains measuring individual skills in a 'fair' and 'objective' way (Au, 2016). In this way there is a logic of denial at play, which entails that standardized tests hold the promise that every test taker is objectively offered a fair and equal chance at educational, social and economic achievement, which is not the case (Au, 2013). Interpreting standardized test as a tool that is able to control for existing inequalities is something one should be conscious about. The absence presence that involves white supremacy by preserving racial and class inequalities by standardized testing within education should be taken into account.

In the following paragraphs a research done in Canada will be set forth (Eizadirad, 2020). This research shows that racial inequalities are still enacted in high-stake standardized test, similar to the final Cito test. The experiences of racialized children, parents and educators have been researched which shows that standardized testing within education causes stress, anxiety, fear of failure and being labeled as dumb. Furthermore, standardized testing led to stereotyping, which functions on three levels. The first level of stereotypes constructs the racialized student as low achiever from a young age. This can happen by self-assessment, which leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy and/or by teachers who keep their unique identities, life circumstances, and systematic barriers impacting their academic performances out of notice (Hulchanski, 2007). The second level is that standardized tests perpetuate and re-confirm the stereotype of the racialized student being a low achiever with poor intellectual skills. This is a trend that continues as the student goes on to middle school and high school. The third level is that standardized testing challenges the stereotyped student to produce positive achievement results. This might seem positive, but it takes a huge toll to 'act natural'.

The racialized children in the above-described research are constantly trying to fit in a predominantly white elite space, which is embedded with hierarchical power relations and stereotypical assumptions (Eizadirad, 2020). The sense of self of the participants is influenced and seems to be connected to experiencing imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome entails that an individual feels that they do not truly deserve to be there and that they are fooling anyone who thinks otherwise (Gardner & Holley, 2011). This is exhausting and socio-emotionally draining, which can lead to poor performance, feelings of exclusion and not belonging, which in turn can result in invisible scars and can have traumatizing effects (Eizadirad, 2020). This might especially be the case with pupils (and their parents) who feel that their score does not equate to the image of themselves and the way they are perceived by their surroundings. In this case the score that is created by the final Cito-test is in

conflict with one's sense of self. Scores namely change how others think about an individual and how the individual thinks about themselves (Hanson, 1993). Tests are actors that transform, mold, and even create the hierarchical structure within society.

The focus of this research is not perse on racialized individuals, but the above-described literature exposes the absence presence of preserving inequality that is at play within educational high-stake standardized test. It furthermore exposes how the dissemination of the idea that standardized tests are an objective measurement tool of intelligence, can be harmful for those children that feel that they are not able to identify with the score they received. This may affect their sense of self. These standardized tests tend to categorize people within a hierarchical structure, by scoring people high or low on a high-stake test. The dissemination of the historical idea that standardized test within education are an objective measurement of one's intelligence has not been questioned since its implementation. There is a silence surrounding to what aim these tests were implemented; namely to preserve racial and class inequalities.

The categories that come forth out of the final Cito test results have disappeared into infrastructure and habit. Therefore, it seems "right" or "reasonable" because they are rooted into everyday life maintained by organizations, governments, and individuals (Cicourel, 1964: 21; Bowker and Star, 2000). As a result, there is a feeling of pluralistic ignorance which entails the feeling of being the only one experiencing a problem because it became a habitually aspect of life (Bowker & Star, 2000). All information systems are suffused with ethical and political values. These are active creators of categories as well simulators of existing categories, which can be harmful for a large group of people that do not fit in the average standard. Bowker and Star (2000) therefore urge the fact that we keep open and explore spaces for change and flexibility that are otherwise lost forever.

3. Method

To answer the research questions, the scavenger methodology has been used as guidance, a concept introduced by Jack Halberstam (1998). He describes that this is a form of queer methodology that "uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally been excluded from traditional studies of human behavior" (Halberstam, 1998, p.13). During this research documentaries and websites have been watched, meetups were attended, a document analysis has been conducted and conversations were held. The scavenger methodology was the appropriate guidance for this research trajectory, because in the making and remaking process several different momentums, aspects, new documents and feelings are folded into the final Cito test. To uncover the different layers that normally stay invisible, it was therefore needed to follow the traces, which can include many different things and methods.

The first form of analyzing was an interpretation of the document that plays the leading role in this research: the final Cito test. The final Cito test (2019) has been analyzed by using critical discourse analysis. This kind of analysis, influenced by Michel Foucault, helps to link language and its modes of use to the significance of power and social difference in society (Bryman, 2015). There are many different fields in which this research topic is represented and that is why it is valuable to follow the traces of this document. The traces are visible on the news, in documentary series, such as 'Tussen Meten en Weten' (Bor, 2017) and 'Klassen' (Sybling & Gould, 2020). These visible traces show that there are palpable traces involved.

To get a deeper understanding of the palpable traces ten conversations with different people have been held. These people were all (not on purpose) in a position that did not corresponded with their final Cito test score. The ten participants of the research were found by an appeal on social media. The message that has been posted on social media received about thirty responses. Due to time constrictions conversations were held with the ten people that responded first. Some of the other people have left emails or messages about their experience with the final Cito test and I have tried to include their story anonymously in the analysis. The form of sampling that is being used in this research might be considered as a form of purposive sampling, which means that sampling has been done in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research question (Bryman, 2015). To be more particular: the form of purposive sampling that has been used is criterion sampling. Criterion sampling entails that the sampling of the participants will have to meet a particular criterion which was that the participants needed to have a certain association with the final Cito test. That means that participants were convinced that the result of the final Cito test can have long term effects and/or has affected them personally, in advance.

Based on previous experience, participants tend to be very aware of the fact that they are being interviewed, and therefore they might give socially desired answers. Thus, the preference was to have conversations instead of interviews within this research. I have not used a fixed format and shared my own experiences with the participants to create a safer environment for sharing. By minimizing the data-collection instruments the opportunity of genuinely revealing the research participants' perspectives potentially increases (Bryman, 2015). With this method it is more likely that aspects of people's social world that are particularly important to them, but that might not have occurred otherwise, will come forth.

The participants of this research were fully informed about the goal of the research. They have given an oral consent for their collaboration in the research. The participants have received my name and contact details. All the processing activities have been recorded with good data practices. The conversations are annotated in ATLAS.ti and records have been kept of all the people who were

involved in this research. The conversations have been processed anonymously. The analysis method that has been used for the conversations in this research is critical coding. Based on the coding, further work has been done on concept development (Becker, 2008).

4. Analyses

In the following part the results of this research will be set forth. In part 4.1 the analyzation of the final Cito test as document will be discussed. The different elements that are enacted in or belong to this test are set forth. In part 4.2 the active role of these elements is further explored by describing the palpable traces.

4.1 Document analyses

4.1.1 The document of the final Cito test

On one of the first pages of the final Cito test the following statement is made: “This booklet contains four tasks. You are working on the task that is next: you do not work forward, and you do not adjust answers in the previous tasks.”(Centrale Eindtoets, 2019a, p. 3). In addition, four other rules and/or instructions are described, such as the fact that one is obliged to use the pencil and eraser that was included with the test. On the following page, the test starts.

Within two days, the children are expected to fulfill different tasks within specific time slots. The test comprises a part about language and a part about math, in which children need to answer multiple choice questions. The first task on the first day is a language task in which children get assessed by twenty assignments which they have to finish within thirty minutes. For example, a question could be: “In which sentence are both of the bold words correctly spelled?” (Centrale Eindtoets, 2019a, p. 4). The second task are twenty assignments about math for which they receive thirty-five minutes, which is a mix of shorter and longer questions. With regards to the longer questions, children are expected to gain the test question and/or answers from the story that is provided. These are followed by language tasks, in which they have to read two stories and answer questions regarding the text. The next task tests the ability to look up information, for example, on the internet. The last task of the first examination day is again a math task, in which the children receive thirty-five minutes to answer twenty math questions. The second day is organized in a similar manner with language tasks that alternated by math task (Centrale Eindtoets, 2019b). In between questions there are some images placed, most these images are connected to the assignment. For example, a depiction of a dinosaur with a question about dinosaurs. Other images show a child doubting between the options of the question, such as a child that is doubting between choosing a puzzle piece on which A, B, C and D are depicted.

4.1.2 *The active role of the final Cito test*

There are several notable aspects about this document. The first thing are the instructions and/or rules that underscore the fact that this is not comparable with other tests done in school. Such as the fact that the children are not allowed to skip a question that they find difficult and go back at a later moment. Furthermore, they are not allowed to use their own pencil and eraser but are obliged to use the one that is provided by Cito. The seriousness of the test is depicted using images of a doubting child needing to choose between the multiple answers. This underscores the fact that the child should consider the different answers before they choose the 'right' answer. In addition, the strikingly specific time limits add a form of pressure. By illustrating, showing, describing and telling that this test is not similar to other tests it emphasizes the high-stakes that are connected to this test. Logically, this might lead to stress, anxiety, fear of failure and being labeled as dumb (Eizadirad, 2020).

The second notable aspect is the fact that there are only two elements being questioned, namely math and language, to decide which learning path in high school is suitable. Within the final Cito test the language element is most crucial. Not only because of the fact that there are more language tasks represented in the test, but also because when making the math tasks linguistic skills are needed to understand what the question or right answer is. Furthermore, these two elements are limited versions of what language and math are. Language is limited to reading, language cultivation and spelling and math is limited to numbers, ratios, measures, geometry and connection (Heij, 2021). To which extent mastering these limited skills in language and math are capable of predicting which educational career a child is able to fulfill, has never been researched and is therefore based on assumptions (Wilbrink, 1997, p. 364).

On the basis of a combined score of the two tested elements children are ordered into the learning path that corresponds with their score (Heij, 2021). Cito has chosen to work with a scale that has a mean score of 535 and a standard deviation of ten. The range of the score can vary in between 501 – 550. This somewhat weird range is chosen to avoid any confusion with school grades (Wijnstra, 1984, p. 13). This scale is used for every Cito test, so the Cito test scores of previous years are comparable. The mean score and the spread around the mean remain almost exactly comparable each year (van Boxtel, Engelen & de Wijs, 2011). This entails that scores are distributed in the shape of a bell-curve (Heij, 2021). In order to create this bell-curve it is necessary to realize a variation in degree of difficulty in such a way that the spread around the average is large enough. To create this spread a variation of hard and easy question are being created. Cito therefore assumes that there are no national changes in the general level of learning progress.

This standardized method always leads to approximately half of the children getting assigned to a more practical orientated high school path and the other half getting assigned to a more academic

oriented high school path. This happens with the underlying assumption, who is not theoretical must be practical (Terwel, 2006, p. 11). This method is combined with a school inspection that checks for 'deviant' school advice. With other words, a high school advice that does not correspond with the final Cito test score. This generates a self-fulfilling prophecy based on the comparative test scores, which are based on results from the past (Heij, 2021).

...results of students from the past, based on comparative test scores that have been constructed differently over time because the tests have indeed changed in content, have thus become decisive for the possibilities that new generations of students receive. In this way, a pupil not only takes his own results from the past into the future, but also the results that other pupils have achieved, years before them, on substantively different tests and under different circumstances. (Heij, 2021, p. 78).

In other words, the by Cito created calculation method that is being used to produce a bell-curve results into a self-fulfilling prophecy that becomes decisive for the possibilities of future generations.

4.2 Conversations about the final Cito test

4.2.1 Feelings and consequences of those feelings when making the final Cito-test

The dissemination of the idea that one's intelligence is objectively measured by the final Cito test and therefore deciding which high school path is most suitable, are creating palpable traces. A recurring theme in the conversations that were held for this research was the fact that this test is a snapshot out of someone's live. This entails that making the final Cito-test during two random days in a person's live, only based on the two tested elements, decides which learning path in high school is assigned while environmental and/or psychological aspects might have influenced their performance.

Many of the participants felt that their performance was effected by negative experiences outside or within primary school. The participants that had to deal with difficult situations outside of school mentioned subjects such as one of the parents getting seriously ill, having a lot of fights at home or parents that where in the middle of a divorce. These participants mentioned that these things effected their concentration and the amount of attention there was at home, for what they felt was an important moment in their live. Participant three mentioned the following about the fact that she was taken out of the class by a healthcare facility to talk about the problems at home: "I do remember that before we started with the Cito test that I was taken out of class to have a chat with the GGD, nicely timed. I always found that very awkward."

In addition, many of the participants described that they had negative experiences within school that effected their performances such as feeling unseen, having a teacher that did not believe in their abilities, feeling abnormal because they needed tutoring according to their teacher or parents and/or feeling dumb. The overarching aspect that effected these experiences was that they were not excelling in one of the two elements that is tested within the final Cito test namely, the limited versions of math and language. Participant four described this as the following: "At the time I felt like I was not believed in or something. That does something to you, and it makes you think; am I able to do this?" The effects of these negative experiences are corresponding with the research of Eizadirad (2020). In this research about the experiences of racialized children, parents and educators, racialized students are labeled as low achiever from a young age. This can happen in two ways namely by self-assessment and/or by teachers that keep their unique identities, life circumstances, and systematic barriers impacting their academic performances out of notice. Similarly, this seemed to be true with the participants of this research. This seemed to be influenced by the fact that teachers are so drilled to focus on the final Cito test score, because the teachers are also getting assessed on the basis of the results of their class.

The main goal seems to ensure that the children in the school score as "high" as possible. The three participants that are working within education described that schools and teachers are getting assessed on the average Cito test score, which can affect the job of the teacher and the survival of the school. One of these participants (six) described that in her work as a remedial educationalist, she had to help two brothers that according to a regular school they were in, needed to go special primary school education on the basis of test that were taken, created by Cito. This is a form education that is created for children that need intensive or special educational guidance. After analyzing the behavior of the brothers and taking an intelligence test, which was not created by Cito, the results showed that the development of these brothers was average. She describes the following about this situation:

I happen to have two boys and they are of foreign descent, two brothers, and they do have a language deficiency and from time to time at the school I can taste that they have something like, these children just have to leave our school. These children just have to go to special primary education, and we have done an intelligence research and the language speech research that has been done was all average. That is actually no indication at all to send a pupil to special primary education, so that school has to get to work. They have to organize it in such a way that it will fit to offer the education that suits him, and I taste, between the lines, every time, that that is difficult.

What is notable is that educational system within this regular school is very much focused on Cito tests. What is interesting here is that based on the test created by Cito these boys are scoring below average but based on the test that are taken by the remedial educationalist this is not the case. The fact that the Cito is so focused on language, limited to reading, language cultivation and spelling, and math tasks that are also wrapped in stories seems to be affecting the results of these two boys that are struggling with language deficiency. Furthermore, the first level of stereotyping is at play which entails that these racialized children are labeled as low achievers from a young age by the school. The school is keeping their unique identities, life circumstances, and systematic barriers impacting their academic performances out of notice (Hulchanski, 2007).

The high-stakes that are connected to the final Cito test are according to the participants projected on them by mostly teachers but also parents and media. At the time of taking the test, many of the participants felt that their lives dependent on it. They experienced a lot of pressure to do “well”. Doing “well” in this test meant for most of them that they would receive a score that was connected to a more academic orientated high school career. “Mavo”, which is the most academical of the practical orientated high school levels, was the minimum score most of them wanted to receive. The level “kader” was for most of them a high school path that was connected to “low” and the schools that were providing this level were stigmatized by the participants. Participant three said the following about this:

I really wanted to go to ‘location that was providing mavo’ and because of my score I immediately received a stamp that that was not going to happen. I experienced that especially very negatively and annoying. Also, because at the time there were quite a lot of stories circulating about ‘location that was providing kader’ that more things happened there that you thought oh, I don't want to be there with my twelve years of age. That made me even more anxious.

Many of the participants experienced the high-stakes that were connected to the final Cito test as negative and for that reason the test felt for many of them like a “monster”. They therefore felt extremely nervous and stressed when taking the test and receiving the score. These nerves expressed itself in failure anxiety which could lead to psychological problems such a headache, crying, sweating and/or a stomachache. Some participants created all kinds of doom scenarios in their head when making the test, such as participant five did:

All of a sudden I got really hot and broke out in sweat. Then I looked at all those questions and I thought: I really don't want to do this because I knew I was very bad at all of it. What if I score

super bad on this and maybe score well in math, but then I still have this part which is very bad and then taken all together it is still very bad. All those kind of thoughts were circulating in my head.

These kind of feelings are corresponding with the research of Eizadirad (2020) who shows that standardized testing within education causes stress, anxiety and fear of failure.

When receiving their score, a lot of the participants felt like their doom scenario's became truth. Many of the participants were very disappointed in their score. They felt that their score was "low", "bad" and therefore connected their score to a negative experience. The negative experience with their score were in many cases identified with one's sense of self by themselves or others. Many of the participants had a disappointed or disagreeable parent that would confront the teacher with this. Some of the parents wrote letters to high schools to accept their children on a level that was not compatible with their final Cito test score. Another parent demanded a retake of the final Cito test. In some cases, additional IQ tests were taken as proof that the final Cito test score was not compatible with their child. Participant ten describes the following about her score and the reaction of her parents:

She was like okay, this may be your score, but you immediately receive advice for a school as well. My mother immediately thought no, but you are not kader. No, we're really not going to do this, because you can do better than that. While I myself.. Look of course parents really do play a role in certain things with children. As a child you cannot really determine things yourself, but I actually thought that too.

In this example it is very obvious that the score of this participant is connected to a school level and this level is then identified with a way of being, by saying: "...you are not kader". For some of the participants the score of the final Cito test was a conformation or a perpetuation of feeling like one was "dumb". This corresponds with the second level of stereotyping in the research of Eizadirad (2020), in which the racialized student is stereotyped as being a low achiever with poor intellectual skills. All the above-described situations have in common that their score effected one's sense of self. This corresponds with the way Hanson (1993) describes the fact that scores change how others think about an individual and how the individual thinks about themselves.

The final Cito-test created an environment in which many participants felt like this was the start of segregation and comparison, and there was no way back. Participant one described this in the following way:

The Cito test is then your first experience... you feel the threat of separation. Here the smart from the less smart are separated. Here comes levels. Here comes stigmas. Here come labels. You actually feel this is the end of childhood. This is the end of harmony. I think there was such a feeling in myself abstractly. Here comes the division between people.

Children are getting through the final Cito test confronted with the concept of categorization within the hierarchical structure of society, where the feeling of being a child clears away in exchange for a label. While this is obviously happening on the basis of the score of this test there is a silence surrounding it. Many of the participants experienced this silence by the fact that no one explicitly mentioned that their score was not connected to the top of the hierarchical structure. This became clear for them by the disappointment or disagreement of their parents. Also, in the way how students with "high" score were praised by the school and the teacher. This all together made them feel inferior and made their position in within the hierarchical structure clear.

4.2.1 The traces of the final Cito test on one's sense of self

For most of the participants it was approximately fifteen years ago that they made the final Cito test. Although it was long ago many of them could still remember the material details of the test and the feelings that were evoked by those materials. Participant two could still in detail retell the logo of the test and the negative emotions this logo evoked. Participant nine still remembered the answering sheet and the small letters and circles one had to fill in, which made the final Cito test extremely difficult for her because she has dyslexia. Many of participants could still remember the envelope with the final Cito test score and what score they received. The fact that many of the participants still remembered the material details is illustrating that the final Cito test has left its palpable traces. Participant three describes the following about this:

You know how long has it been since we took the Cito test? It was a really long time ago. Still when I think about it, I think oh yes the Cito test, that was a shame. That makes you think... this should not be the case. There are also other exams that I have taken by which I think, oh well that was a shame, but that is different, because that isn't that decisive for the rest of your live.

Participant three describes the way in which the final Cito test differs from other exams she has taken, because she felt that these exams weren't as determinative. The feeling that the results that come forth out of this test are so influential that it leads to a hierarchical position in society, is a commonly mentioned aspect. This is why the following part will describe the traces of the final Cito test. The traces

that will be described are not claiming to be a direct effect of the final Cito test. The traces should be read as the experience of the participant with the final Cito test and the possible life it can develop in one's future.

All the participants were against the final Cito test in its current form. For many of them this had to do with the high-stakes that were connected to it. Their negative experience has affected their further motivation with regards to education. It effected their motivation because they felt like the test confirmed a self-image of feeling dumb, which again corresponds with the first level of stereotypes (Eizadirad, 2020). Some of the participants choose to stop working hard for school to explain unsatisfactory marks. In contrary many of the participants described that they felt like they wanted to proof the people, that gave them the feeling that they were dumb, wrong. The people that they were referring to were mostly teachers that were convinced that the score was accurately representing them and did not want to deviate from this. Participant three described this feeling as follows:

Yes, that did demotivate me at first, but I have to say that it motivated me later in life. I remember at a certain point I had completed my propaedeutic year in higher vocational education and then I was actually about to go back and say: "here in your face, what kader, look at me now. Here you have my propeduese, have fun with it."

Transforming the demotivation into motivation is corresponding with the third level of stereotypes which entails the challenging of stereotypes. At first sight this seems positive, but as Eizadirad (2020) shows the challenging of your stereotype can be socio-emotionally draining and can lead to poor performance and feelings of exclusion and not belonging.

In the case of the participants the majority mentioned they still find it hard to assess or to be assessed. For example, the participants that worked in education talked about the difficulties they experienced with schools getting assessed on the results of the final Cito test. One of these participants (two) described the way she hates the fact that she has to give grades, because she feels that grades are carrying a negative feeling of needing to achieve in a competitive world. She described this internal struggle as follows:

Now I am suddenly in the kind of role of, of person with power and they sometimes look at me like; what is my grade, what is my grade because then I know whether I will pass. Then I think; do I have to determine that?; why do I have to do this?; who am I? Then I suddenly get very like, what am I actually doing.

It is visible in this quote that the participant took her personal negative experience with being assessed into her job, in which it is expected of her to assess children by grades. This is an often-mentioned aspect by participants who had a negative experiences with the final Cito test. Corresponding with the first form of stereotyping described by Eizadirad (2020) the participants experienced self-doubt when they were to be assessed. In the first level of stereotypes standardized testing leads to stereotypes because the racialized student is labeled as low achiever from a young age which in this case happens by self-assessment. Although all of the participants finished or are now in an educational career that does not corresponds with their final Cito score, they still experience doubt about their ability when getting assessed.

The by Eizadirad (2020) mentioned fear of failure that is caused by standardized test was also a returning theme among the participants that had a negative experience with the final Cito test. The fear of failure led to feeling very nervous before and during exams and receiving scores of these exams. The fear of failure especially accorded when they had to do a re-sit. A feeling of panic and doubting oneself would get the better of them. Participant four describes the following about this feeling:

Yes, I always had severe panic if I had a re-sit. I really thought; this is the end of the world. I don't have that anymore, but I consciously chose Leiden University instead of Erasmus, because I thought the re-sit system was completely different on Erasmus then at Leiden where you can just re-sit every subject twice and I knew at Erasmus it is different. Just based on that, I already choose Leiden, because I thought I needed more re-sits. While perhaps that would not have been the case.

Furthermore, some of the participants mentioned that they experienced a fear of failure when they did not receive a clear task on a test. Some of the participants also experienced this during their career, which would lead to insecurities taking over. For some of the participants their fear of failure and self-doubt led to problems in working and personal life, with burn-out and/or depression as a result. Furthermore, the fear of failure and self-doubt led for some participants to experiences imposter syndrome. This entails that an individual feels that they do not truly deserve to be there and that they are fooling anyone who thinks otherwise (Garder & Holley, 2011). Participant eight describes her first day in higher vocational education, which did not correspond her final Cito test score, as follows:

I remember very well that suddenly there I was. I really had a realization moment of what? I'm in higher vocational education and teachers here don't look at me like what is she doing here. They just think; that's another load of students. Then I really had a kind of panic that I thought;

now I have to make it happen, because I'm here now. I kind of fell into a hole. I was suddenly like, how is it possible that I'm here which made me very insecure.

Here the participant describes the way in which she felt like she did not belong in higher vocational education, based on with her final Cito score. The same feeling was described when one received a more than average grade for their first test within the educational field that was not compatible with their final Cito score.

It became clear in the conversations and messages of the participants that they felt like their self-image or experienced that the self-image of someone in their environment, was effected when receiving the final Cito score. Some of the participants described that they still believe that they are bad at either math or language, because at the time they poorly performed on this part of the final Cito test. Furthermore, the majority of the participants felt like their score was not “high” enough and therefore they felt that the learning path they were doing in high school was not good enough and felt that the final Cito test has negatively affected their chances in educational system. Some of the participants needed psychological help to strengthen their self-image. Only when receiving a diploma of a “higher” educational career that did not corresponded with the Cito-test score, they gained complete self-worth again. Participant nine describes this as follows: “But when I finished my higher vocational education degree, I was finally like, you see I can do it.”

The traces that are evoked and/or provoked by the material aspects, such as the Cito logo and the answering sheet, are an illustration of the impact that the final Cito test had on these participants. It has affected their sense of self in different negative ways such as feeling dumb, finding it hard to be assessed or to assess others, feeling anxious when making an exam and experiencing psychological issues. These feeling firstly led to demotivation but for many of the participants it was transformed into feeling motivated and working extra hard to fight the negative experience of the final Cito test they carry with them.

5. Conclusion and discussion

To answer the central question of this research; *How is the underlying idea of the final Cito test, as an objective measurement tool of intelligence, related to one's sense of self?* documentaries and websites have been watched, a document analyses have been conducted and ten conversations were held. These conversations were held with people that felt like the final Cito-test can have long term effects and/or has affected them personally. In this part an answer to the research question is formulated. Thereafter a reflection will be given on the most important concepts of the theoretical framework in relation to the research question. Subsequently the forms of relevance that were introduced in the

introduction will be discussed. Finally, a reflection on the research process and recommendations for further research will be provided.

5.1 Conclusion and discussion

On the basis of the results of this research the underlying idea of the final Cito test as an objective measurement tool of intelligence, can be related to one's sense self which in turn can be connected to the hierarchical structure within society. There are high-stakes that are connected to the final Cito test which are expressed in a way by which many of the participants felt the pressure to do "well". Furthermore, the main focus on the limited versions of math and language with an emphasis on reading ability, can be considered as a disadvantage for people who do not excel in these specific components.

Many of the participant were disappointed with their score. They feel like the final Cito test was an unfair measurement tool to assess their capabilities. They considered it to be a snapshot of only two days, and environmental and/or psychological aspects might have influenced their performance of the final Cito test. Being disappointed in their scores effected the way in which many of the participants thought about their selves. This expressed itself in feeling dumb, being afraid of failure, experiencing difficulties with being assessed or assessing other people, having demotivation problems for schoolwork, working extra hard to proof people wrong, having imposter syndrome and having self-doubt. It is impossible to state that the final Cito test had a one-to-one effect on the feelings of the participants, but the findings of my study suggest that it did affect how they precepted their further educational career. Fortunately, all of the participants were able to deconstruct their negative experience with the final Cito-test.

The results of this research have exposed the active role and therefore social configuration of the final Cito test. The final Cito test as a document is a decisionmaker but additionally it is much more. By unfolding this document, the multi-temporalities that are folded into the test became visible again. The history that is enacted in the final Cito test have helped to understand the here and now by showing the absence presence of the test. The history of standardized tests within education is rooted in racism which leads to denial of structural inequalities by the dissemination of the idea that it is an objective measurement tool of one's intelligence. The Dutch creator of the final Cito test describes that his test is supposed to end the homogenized forms of education based on classes within society, which unfortunately is not the case. It is instead maintaining the inequalities that are rooted in society with non-scientifically predication based on the limited components (Merry & Boterman, 2020; Heij, 2021; Wilbrink, 1997, p.364).

The idea that the final Cito-test is an objective tool to measure one's intelligence is actually effecting one's sense of self. This happens when receiving a score which changes how others think

about the individual and how the individual thinks about oneself (Hanson, 1993). Furthermore, the final Cito test causes stress, anxiety, fear of failure and being labeled as dumb which is in line with the research by Eizadirad (2020). In addition, there are three levels of stereotypes which entail: (1) children being labeled as low achiever from a young age; (2) this is re-confirmed by standardized tests; and (3) the way which pupils are challenged by standardized tests to go against their stereotype. Regarding the participants that had a negative experience with the final Cito test, the results of my research are in line with the results of Eizadirad's (2020).

The by the government obliged final Cito test has created a lot of data which in turn is used to create a bell-curve. By comparing the data, Cito is able to regulate the fact that about approximately half of the children are assigned to a more practical orientated high school path and the other half are assigned to a more academic oriented high school path. The final Cito test has become a habitually aspect of life in which the harmfulness of its standardized system is being ignored. This categorization of people is very much rooted in the hierarchical structure of society, in which the sense of what is "right" or "reasonable" has disappeared (Bowker & Star, 2000).

This research has shown that the portraying of the final Cito test as an objective tool to measure one's intelligence can be harmful for the people that do not fit into the average standard. It should be acknowledged that the final Cito test is a snapshot of a person's life and their capacities at a specific moment in time. It has never been researched if the elements that are tested with the final Cito test are able to correctly predict which educational career a child will fulfill in the future (Wilbrink, 1997, p. 364). De Groot (1983) wanted to fulfill the growing trend of individualization and measurability, and therefore he used standardized test. But the fact that these test were at the same time used in the US educational system to preserve racial and class inequality, should provide some food for thought.

Thus, the elements that are tested in the final Cito test are not rooted in science but rooted in a measuring-obsessed society that is created by a culture of white elite man. The final Cito test is not an appropriate tool to measure one's intelligence or to predict which high school path a child will be able to fulfill. The final Cito test is maintaining class and racial inequality by the dissemination of the idea that it is an objective tool to measure intelligence. The habitually culture that surrounds this test has provided circumstances in which not many people question this idea. The calculation method that is being used by Cito shows that it is not about finding out which learning path is most suited but about producing a bell curve year after year. This is conserved with the reinforcing argument that it is an objective measurement tool, without taking into account what the consequences are for individuals. The data that is created by the final Cito test should therefore be received consciously. It therefore might not be suited for other scientific research such as Program for International Student Assessment because of its assumption-based nature.

With regards to the research process there are a number of limitations which lead to recommendations. Firstly, the research of Eizadirad (2020) has focused on racialized children. In this research I did not specifically focus on the hardships that racialized children experience within the Dutch educational system. It is known that this specific group of children is very much negatively affected by the final Cito test according to statical data (Heij, 2021). It could therefore be interesting and valuable to perform a qualitative research to get a deeper understanding of the experiences of this specific group. In addition, due to time constrain I was only able to have conversations with ten of the thirty registered participants. For future research it could be valuable to have a larger study sample to delve deeper into the traces of the final Cito test by in-depth conversations.

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7. Appendix



CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: The final Cito test and its folds.

Name, email of student: Tessanne Wiertsema – 474764tw@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Maja Hertoghs - hertoghs@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 9th of March – 20th of June 2021

Is the research study conducted within DPAS
NO

YES -

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. **YES -**
NO

If 'NO': skip to part V.

- NO** If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? YES -
Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. YES -
NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - **NO**

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES -
NO
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES -
NO
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - **NO**
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES -
NO
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES -
NO
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES -
NO
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES -
NO
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES -
NO
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES -
NO
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES -
NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

My subject is going deeper into what standardized test can cause. When people feel that these kinds of tests have caused negative outcomes in their live this might lead to feeling negative emotions. The use of standardized test within education is highly politicized because education is a political subject it is therefore possible that the conversation will lead to political opinions.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

The participants will be informed about what the research is about. By doing this the participants can prepare for any gloomy feelings that they may experience when talking about this subject.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

No.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

I will be collecting my data online by analysing documents. In addition, I will be talking to people. These conversations and their consent will be recorded by Iphone recorder.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

10 participants and 1 document.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

-

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

For the short term I will keep my recordings of the conversation and the consent on an iPhone recorder. This will be used and stored in the period of 18th of April till the 25th of May 2021. In the program of Excel the contact details will be stored in the same period. The program Word will be used for the transcripts of the conversations. This will be stored until the 1st of September 2021. The program ATLAS.Ti will be used for the coding of the transcripts which will also be stored till the 1st of September 2021.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Tessanne Wiertsema

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Once a week.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

The names will not be used in this thesis and all of the other contact details, will be kept in a saved/ secured Excel file. The different data processing programs will be secured.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Tessanne Wiertsema

Name (EUR) supervisor: Maja Hertoghs

Date: 20th of June 2021

Date: 20th of June 2021

APPENDIX I: Informed Consent Form (if applicable)

Dear participant,

My name is Tessanne Wiertsema, and I am master student *Engaging public issues*, which is a part of sociology department, at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. We have agreed to have a conversation about the final Cito test.

Everything we discuss during our conversation will be anonymized. In this way it is impossible for readers of my thesis to recognize that you are the one who gave me certain information. The documents that I will create by writing this thesis will be secured with passwords. To ensure that everything is done in the right way, I have a supervisor named Maja Hertoghs, who is connected to the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Only me and my supervisor have access to your contact details which can concern your name, mail address, skype/zoom address and/or phone number. This data will be kept until the 1st of September 2021. If you want to know more about this, you can of course ask me any questions you have or contact my supervisor at the following e-mail address: hertoghs@essb.eur.nl

It is also always possible to contact me to view, change, delete or limit the data you have shared with me. Furthermore, if you wish, you can withdraw your participation in this research, or if necessary, submit a complain at privacy@eur.nl

I am looking forward to our conversation.

With kind regards,

Tessanne Wiertsema
474764tw@eur.nl