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Impacts of Race, Tracking and Advanced Course Experiences on Self-Esteem, Identity and
Access to Higher Education Among Students of Color

A Thesis Presented The Department of Sociology
Oberlin College

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April 15, 2021

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Abstract

This paper contributes to existing research on race, educational experiences, access to higher education, and self-esteem. Through fifteen in-depth interviews with Oberlin students of color, I investigate the impact of tracking in high school experiences as it relates to self-esteem and identity. Additionally, I examine how these experiences, along with educational support, affect access to higher education. Three major findings emerge. First, during late elementary school/early middle school, students are assessed, grouped by presumed abilities, and placed in specific, racialized educational tracks. My participants described a train analogy in which the advanced track train leaves the station in early middle school. Once departed, there are minimal opportunities to change tracks, creating barriers to advanced high school classes, further disadvantaging students of color regarding access to higher education. Second, competing identities emerge, particularly among Black and biracial students tracked into advanced courses. An educational identity—in which students strive for academic excellence—emerges alongside a social identity rooted in cultural dissonance, isolation, and alienation during interactions with Black peers/community members with limited access to higher education. These dueling identities affect self-concept and self-esteem negatively. Third, high school type (i.e., public or private) impacts students' access to resources ranging from preparatory skills to individualized guidance counselor support. Elite colleges tend to recruit from predominantly white private high schools, thus perpetuating racialized gatekeeping practices and further disadvantaging students of color.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank all of my interviewees who were willing to share their experiences and participate in my research. I am beyond grateful for all of their contribution and providing the story to tell. Additionally, I would like to thank the Multicultural Resource Center, Student Senate, and Candice Raynor for being willing to share my recruitment flyer digitally as sharing physical flyers due the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge. Equally important to my work was the support, guidance, and patience of Professor Christie Parris and Professor Greggor Mattson. The fall semester seminar led by Greggor Mattson was essential to my success in the initial stages of the research process. Christie Parris agreeing to be my honors advisor for the spring really changed my honors experience for the better. I would also like to thank my fellow sociology honors students for their inspiration and accountability. Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, and significant other for always supporting, encouraging, and challenging me.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“The difference in me and my teammates happened before high school, maybe back when they did the gifted test or whatever. I don't think that's all that it was, but I think that was a big factor. By the time we hit high school, everybody thought of me up here. [gestures] I didn't have to change anyone's minds. All I had to do was just like stay up here. Whereas, I had a lot of teammates who like, when they entered high school, people are like, "oh, here they are, you know, that's the, the gen ed kid who got suspended last year in eighth grade, um, and started to fight during football practice." Like that was like the labels that some of my teammates had coming into high school... You either have to change everybody's mind or you just stay here. [gestures lower] And I think like a lot of my friends, ya know, just kind of stayed here.”

-Carter

This project aims to examine the ways racism and implicit biases operate in students' high school experiences before attending higher education institutions. From these high school experiences, I am interested in schooling impacts on students' identity formation and academic achievement. I am specifically interested in determining how the role of student's experiences with racism in high school affects self-esteem and academic achievement regarding gifted and special education courses. The questions that I seek to investigate are as follows: What are the permanent impacts of racism on identity formation? How does this identity formation affect academic achievement? In what ways might there be to increase the value of minority students' academic strengths to diminish potential negative self-views related to gifted and special education courses? By interviewing college students about early educational experiences, this

project attempts to portray the long-term effects that emerge from the intersection of minority kids receiving racially unequal education and how this affects their identities as students of color (self) and academic performance due to implicit treatment and biases from teachers and school systems at large.

Previous research has been conducted on race and academic achievement related to higher education and corresponding experiences (Jack, 2019). In contrast, less investigation has been completed on the role of racism and implicit bias in the high school years as potential contributors to self-doubt and academic performance during this secondary education period. Previous research has found that students of color have relatively high general self-esteem (Bachman, O'Malley, Freedman-Doan, Trzesniewski, & Donnellan, 2011). However, less is known about the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance for students of color. Additionally, in highlighting these processes qualitatively, there could be enough evidence to support the development of intervention strategies for teacher training and reducing these implicit biases or just the knowledge of how these effects their students in their futures. These intervention strategies could serve to increase minority students' successes with schooling.

Race, Racism, and White Supremacy

Sociologists conceptualize racism as consisting of two interlocking dimensions: an institutional mechanism of domination that is structural and a corresponding ideological belief that justifies the oppression of people whose physical features and cultural patterns differ from those of the politically and socially dominant group (white people) (Thompson and Neville, 1999). J. Jones (1997) defines racism as the transformation of race prejudice through the exercise of power against a racial group perceived as inferior. Graves (2001) discusses how many scientists argue that race is not biological but rather a social fabrication. Additionally, this

exercise of power can be individual, institutional, and cultural (Belgrave and Allison, 2019c). The most relevant type of racism to African American psychology is white supremacy (Neville and Pieterse, 2009). White supremacy is a system in which whites, particularly the socioeconomic elite, have established and maintained an unfair system serving to systematically exclude Blacks' full participation and development in a given society (Neville and Pieterse, 2009).

White supremacy culture permeates into all aspects of life. Some white supremacy culture traits include perfectionism, sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, only one right way, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, I'm the only one, progress is bigger, more, objectivity, and right to comfort (Okun, 2016). These are harmful views, processes, and beliefs that often are not even acknowledged as part of a white supremacy narrative. One of the purposes of listing characteristics and pointing out aspects of white supremacy culture is highlighting how organizations often implicitly implement these characteristics as their norms and standards. This then makes it difficult to open the door to other cultural norms and standards, leading to organizational isomorphism. Organizational isomorphism refers to the constraining processes forcing a person within a larger population to resemble other people in the same environmental conditions, ie. dominant white culture (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). As a result, while saying we want to be multicultural, many of our organizations only allow other people and cultures to come in if they adapt or conform to already existing cultural norms of white supremacy culture (Okun, 2016). Identifying and recognizing the cultural norms and standards you want is a first step to making room for a truly multicultural organization (Okun, 2016).

There are eight chapters total that follow. In Chapter 2, I discuss previous research regarding schooling experiences, self-esteem and self-concepts for people of color, particularly for Black students, tracking, gifted/talented education, advanced courses, and culture. In Chapter 3, I describe in depth the methods and procedures of interviewing, collecting participant data, transcribing, and analyzing qualitative interview data. In Chapter 4, I provide an introduction to the subsequent three findings chapters, outline an overview of background information and concepts occurring in the school system and provide crucial contexts that will lead to the understanding of later discussions, events, mechanisms and processes at work, discussed in detail by participants. I also discuss some important concepts like tracking, gifted and talented education, and how the system of tracking to higher level courses has racist implications on the school system at large infringing upon later access to higher education. In Chapter 5, I present my findings on participants' experiences in advanced courses and how few students of color took these courses, how school demographics were not being reflected in their AP and gifted and talented course tracks. Additionally, I present findings on the ways different tracking systems set up within schools lead to high levels of racial segregation. In Chapter 6, I report my findings on the emergence of competing identities; an educational scholarly identity, and a student's social identity. This dueling identity particularly arises among Black or biracial students, who have been tracked into advanced courses, striving to do well in high school, and also attend college. These students simultaneously develop feelings of cultural dissonance and isolation and alienation when interacting with other Black peers and Black community who didn't have the same support, were not tracked or pushed to their fullest potential, and thus face limited access to higher education. Coping with this dueling identity affects self-concept and self-esteem negatively.

In Chapter 7, I explain my findings on schools as potent socializing forces. Additionally, I discuss that teachers are in a role to significantly influence their students. The type of school a student attends greatly affects their access to high educational recruiting strategies. For example, elite liberal arts institutions such as Oberlin College appear to be primarily recruiting from private high schools where students have access to preparatory skills to succeed at prestigious academic institutions. However, just as gifted and talented programs or GATE in California literally is a gatekeeping program, these recruiting strategies further disadvantages students of color unable to attend such private schools. In chapter 8, I summarize my major findings from my four findings chapters, discuss limitations, and suggest future solutions and implications to my research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Tracking and Self-Esteem among Black Students

Classical sociological theorists have at large discussed many topics related to the self, inequality, and race and racism. George Herbert Mead talked about theories of the self; Karl Marx talked about inequality. Neither classical theories, however, can account for the intersections of race and racism in schooling as it relates to the self and corresponding inequalities related to tracking. The following chapter describes various theories, follows various research studies and literature surrounding schooling experiences, self-esteem and self-concepts for people of color, particularly for Black students, tracking, gifted/talented education, advanced courses, and culture.

Schooling, Academics, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concepts

Cultural mistrust is the belief acquired by African Americans due to past and ongoing mistreatment related to being a member of that ethnic group. Black people cannot trust whites (Terrell, Taylor, Menzise, and Barrett, 2009). One possible reason theorized for the lack of motivation of Black students to perform at their best on cognitive tasks in classes might be due to the belief that White teachers would not give them a fair evaluation regardless of effort and intellect, thus leading to no real compulsion to demonstrate their abilities (Terrell et al., 2009). Irving and Hudley (2005) investigated this potential phenomenon in order to better understand the relationship between expectations for academic success and cultural mistrust among African American high school males. They found that individuals with high mistrust levels had lower academic achievement levels and lower expectations that they would be successful in schools.

Many studies have examined the achievement gap between Black students and white students. Below I detail the myriad of theories, methods, and findings from different studies. Tyson (2011) hypothesizes that the cultural explanation of "acting white" can account for the

Black-white achievement gap. This hypothesis suggests that the culture surrounding Black students equates doing well in school with acting white, and Black students do not do well in school to avoid being labeled as acting white (Tyson, 2011). The underlying assumption of the hypothesis is that race and achievement are connected. She argues that students' segregated learning experiences are related to students connecting achievement to whiteness and detail how racialized tracking is related to students' schooling experiences and isolation for high-achieving Black students (Tyson, 2011). Her findings show that school contexts and structures tend to shape students' attitudes around achievement, but Black students tend to value education and believe that doing well in school is essential to this (Tyson, 2011). Connecting whiteness to achievement emerged when schools began using racialized tracking to segregate students in an era of desegregation. Students start to notice racialized patterns of achievement in elementary school. Still, it is not until adolescence that students begin to use the acting white slur (Tyson, 2011). Tyson (2011) uses the acting white slur's age-related usage to conclude that the connection between race and achievement does not develop until students are exposed to racialized schooling experiences.

Underrepresentation of Black students in advanced courses occurs in predominantly white and racially diverse high schools. High-achieving Black students often experience the acting white slur and social isolation (Tyson, 2011). Tyson (2011) argues that Black students excluded from advanced courses tend to use the acting white slur to help them make sense of the lack of Black students in advanced classes. High-achieving Black students deal with the potential isolation from the racialized tracking structure differently, depending on their sense of self (Tyson, 2011). When high-achieving Black students have a strong sense of self, they can more readily accept Black peers' isolation and resist negative attitudes and behaviors (Tyson, 2011).

High-achieving Black students still developing their sense of self are more vulnerable to peer influence and try to fit in with their Black peers; however, having clear educational goals keeps vulnerable high achieving Black students on track academically (Tyson, 2011). Despite the threat of being labeled as acting white, Tyson (2011) finds that high-achieving Black students are not dissuaded from achieving academically. High-achieving Black students tend to make their course-taking decisions like most adolescents. Students want to pass with a good grade, feel as though they belong, and take courses with friends. However, in predominantly white and racially diverse schools, Black high-achieving students have to choose between the isolation of taking advanced classes and taking courses with their friends (Tyson, 2011). She (2011) reiterates that Black and white students do not have access to the same schooling experiences despite having access to the same schools. Integration has not been achieved, and students do not have the same opportunities to learn.

Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson (2012) ran a preliminary investigation on academic disidentification, racial identity, and academic achievement. Their study's results suggest that how African American adolescents conceptualize and understand their racial identities may be an important area on which to focus intervention efforts (Cokley et al., 2012). Adolescents whose racial identities are primarily shaped by racial stereotypes or antipathy toward the dominant White culture and a narrow conception of "Blackness" will likely have more reactive racial identities at greater risk for academic disidentification and lower academic achievement (Cokley et al., 2012). However, adolescents whose racial identities are "school-oriented and socially conscious," reject racial stereotypes, are open to experiences with different cultures, and who hold a broader conception of "Blackness," will have more nuanced and proactive racial identities that promote academic identification and higher academic achievement (Cokley et al., 2012). As

expected, academic self-concept had a large effect size (β .44) and was significantly predictive of GPA (Cokley et al., 2012). The relationship between academic self-concept and GPA is well-established, with academic self-concept being a consistently strong correlate and GPA predictor. Students who feel confident about their academic abilities should be expected to have higher GPAs than students who feel less secure (Cokley et al., 2012).

Studies indicate that global self-esteem, which is an individual's overall sense of self-worth, and academic self-esteem, which is self-worth related to academics, are positively associated with academic achievement (Morris, Schooler, Schoenbach, 1989; Morris, Schooler, Schoenbach, and Rosenberg, 1995; Auf der Heide, 2008). This relationship holds for white adolescents. While still positive, this relationship is weaker for African Americans, who have high global and academic self-esteem, but meager academic achievement (Auf der Heide, 2008). Studies over the past thirty years consistently show that African Americans have higher self-esteem than their white counterparts yet still perform at lower levels than whites (Rosenberg and Simmons, 1972). This finding suggests that there is something either enhancing white and Asian American youth's academic achievement or interfering with African American, Hispanic, and American Indian youth. Given the strong connection between academic achievement in youth and economic success later in life, failure to understand these gaps has substantial material consequences (Auf der Heide, 2008). Research conducted by Auf der Heide (2008) found that academic self-esteem, as expected, has a significant effect on GPA. Additionally, the impact of academic self-esteem on GPA is much stronger than the global self-esteem indicators. This statement is further support for the contention that self-esteem tied to a specific domain is more likely to affect behavior in that domain than does a global sense of self-worth (Auf der Heide, 2008).

Awad (2007) additionally conducted a study on racial identity, academic self-concept, and self-esteem. The results support findings from previous studies that indicate academic self-concept is one of the best predictors of GPA, which suggests that individuals who have positive attitudes toward school and their scholastic abilities are more likely to perform better in their classes (Awad, 2007). Contrary to previous studies, global self-esteem did not significantly contribute to predicting GPA in the regression model. One reason for these findings may be that global self-concept is too distal a variable to predict substantially GPA when other more proximal variables, such as academic self-concept, are in the model (Awad, 2007). Because the construct of academic self-concept specifically addresses issues related to beliefs about academic skills and abilities, it is not surprising that it would be a better predictor of grades than self-esteem. Racial identity may be indirectly related to GPA, in that it may influence more relevant variables such as academic self-concept. Because academic self-concept addresses students' everyday issues in an educational setting, the relationship between this variable and GPA is expected.

Given that racism and white supremacy permeate all social institutions, it is thought by researchers that Black people are more likely to struggle with issues of self-worth; however these findings are generally false. While self-concepts in specific domains for Black people can be negative, such as academic or racial identity overall global self-worth remains generally positive.

Conceptions of Self and Self-Esteem

In *Even The Rat Was White*, Guthrie (1998) states that researchers who did much of the research of Black and African Americans in early psychology to confirm the inferiority of Black

people. The book reviews the European scientific community's contributions to influencing American social psychology and beliefs about Blacks and how Blacks have been studied over the past two centuries and concludes that Black people generally have high self-esteem and self-concepts despite constant experiences of feelings of inferiority and racism. White people were wrong about how Black people were conceptualizing their self esteem. This belief is important to highlight because early literatures and continuations of such continue to be framed and written from the white dominant European lens narrowing our understanding of what actually is occurring with self concept for Black individuals and groups of people at large.

Self-concept involves beliefs and knowledge about the self (Belgrave & Allison, 2019b). Our self-concept organizes and manages information about how we see ourselves. In contrast, self-esteem is one's affective or emotional reactions toward and feeling about oneself that is also evaluative (Belgrave & Allison, 2019b). The conceptualization of the self depends on culture and socialization. People of African descent are likely to have interdependent conceptualizations of the self (Belgrave & Allison, 2019b). In interdependent cultures, the self is seen as connected to and linked within the surrounding social context, and the self is considered concerning others (Belgrave & Allison, 2019b). This concept means that one's thoughts and behaviors are influenced by relevant others' social context, while racial identity is based on the perception of a shared racial history (Belgrave & Allison, 2019b). African Americans' self-concept has been widely researched and is found to be generally positive; however, historically, researchers described African American's self-concept as having negative self-concepts (Belgrave & Allison, 2019b).

Racial identity and self-esteem are interdependently related. Self-esteem is a frequently studied topic in Western and American psychology. To understand what self-esteem is from an

African and Western perspective, one must understand the differences between Western and African conceptions of the self (Belgrave & Allison, 2019a). From a western standpoint, self-esteem can be described as a feeling of liking or regard for oneself. From an African-centered perspective, the personal self is indistinguishable from the self-derived from membership in the African community (Nobles, 1991). This interconnectedness means that how one affiliates with their groups defines their view of themselves and also involves another issue: a comparison. Many psychological experiments examine the white populations' framework being the norm and then compared to African Americans. These comparison studies also pose issues of creating the otherized and deviant categories against white people's standards or norms (Belgrave & Allison, 2019a).

Richard Allen (2001) discusses the African American self at length. He conceives of the self as personal identity and self-esteem, and group identity as a collective identity. Based on a secondary analysis of national samples of African American adults, he examines the degree to which these self-concepts change over time. Leaning on DuBois' concept of double-consciousness, Allen embraces the notion that the two-ness faced by African Americans leads to an internal struggle to fashion a healthy sense of self. Subsequently, Allen provides evidence that African Americans do not suffer from a lack of self-worth; African Americans have a healthy sense of self. This sense of self-worth varies by education level and within income groups, with higher income individuals having greater self-esteem. Crucially, those with the lowest income and with minimal education show a high sense of self-worth.

Secondly, Allen (2001) examines the relationship of the self to group identity. Through presenting a model of an African American racial belief system consisting of positive stereotypical beliefs, negative stereotypical beliefs, Black autonomy, closeness to elite groups

(politicians and professionals), and closeness to mass groups (Black working class). Findings include that individuals with less income are more likely to embrace negative stereotypes about African Americans. Blacks with less income are more likely to feel a closeness to the Black elite. No difference is found across income groups to feel close to the masses, embrace Black autonomy, or hold positive stereotypical views. Each education group exhibits the same level of Black autonomy. Collectively, African Americans show a greater identification with the masses than with the elites, although they substantially identify with both groups. Self-esteem and group identity are found to remain healthy and stable over an extended period. He concludes that African Americans have a strong attachment to the African American collective.

Tracking

School resource distribution often falls along racial and class lines (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). Because of this, schools are the primary institution to engage in the reproduction and perpetuation of social and racial inequities (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). For example, today's Black students are more likely to attend minority schools than in the 1990s (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). Predominantly minority schools are less able than majority-White schools to provide a full array of educational opportunities (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). Black students who attend racially mixed and predominately White schools are more likely than Whites to be assigned to less academically rigorous coursework, even when Black students' abilities are equivalent to those of White students (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). This process is often referred to as tracking.

For several decades, researchers have documented the effects of tracking students into segregated classrooms according to perceived ability or achievement (Mathis, 2013). Whether known as tracking, sorting, streaming, or ability grouping, an expansive body of literature conclusively shows tracking has been harmful, inequitable, and an unsupportable practice

(Mathis, 2013). Academic tracks correspond to the sequences of courses within subject domains (e.g., English, math, science) that differ in content, rigor, and instruction (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). In theory, the process of tracking should be based on student ability, previous academic achievement, and course availability (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). However, in reality, other factors often influence track assignment, including pressure placed on school decision-makers by parents and students' race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and gender (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). Initially touted to tailor instruction to students' diverse needs, tracking has instead become a way to stratify opportunities to learn, limiting the more beneficial opportunities to high-track students and thereby denying these benefits to lower-tracked students (Mathis, 2013). This practice generally plays out in a discriminatory way, segregating students by race and socioeconomic status (Mathis, 2013). Low-track classes tend to have a watered-down curriculum, less-experienced teachers, lowered expectations, more discipline problems, and less-engaging lessons (Mathis, 2013). When a high-quality, enriched curriculum is provided to all students, the effect benefits both high-achieving and low-achieving students (Mathis, 2013).

Academic tracking by race has been termed second-generation segregation (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). It often occurs in racially mixed and predominately White schools in an attempt to recreate middle-class White privilege under the guise of meritocracy and ability (Walsemann & Bell, 2010). The teachers assigned to high track classes tend to be more experienced and can exercise more power. The parents who can secure high-track placement for their children are disproportionately likely to be white, well-educated, and politically vocal and therefore similarly able to pressure schools to keep higher-track classes for their children – apart from students of lower wealth, students of color, or both (Mathis, 2013). Parents whose social classes are middle or above view their children as projects and continuously imagine, encourage, and support their

personal growth and self-development (Laureau, 2014). Consciously or unconsciously aligned with the professional ideologies of teachers, music and dance instructors, athletic coaches, and other adult leaders of child development/status building institutions, middle-class parents are motivated and equipped to navigate the field of these institutions to maximize their children's opportunities for achievement and self-development (Lareau, 2014). Alliances between high-track teachers and parents are often formed to protect tracking or fend off de-tracking. (Mathis, 2013). Many have argued that racial segregation within schools affects the educational opportunities of racial minorities at least as much as does racial segregation between schools (Walsemann & Bell, 2010).

Specificities to Special Education, Gifted Education and Advanced Classes

Although African American students are rising in the K-12 student population, there is sizable disproportionality in their representation in special education and gifted education programs (Blanchett, 2016; Mayes & Moore, 2016; Mun, Ezzani, Lee, 2020). The disproportionate referral and placement of African American students in special education have become a discursive tool for exercising White privilege and racism (Blanchett, 2006). The school experiences of African American students with special needs are often impacted by school policies, programs, processes, and personnel (Mayes & Moore, 2016). Although the field of special education has moved toward the more equitable treatment of students with disabilities by advocating for inclusive general education placement as standard practice, many African American students who are placed in the less subjective, low-incidence categories of developmental disabilities are educated in segregated, self-contained settings with little or absolutely no exposure or access to their non-disabled peers or the general education curriculum (Blanchett, 2006). Race matters, both in educators' initial decisions to refer students for special

education and subsequent placement decisions for students identified and labeled as having disabilities. Moreover, the stubborn persistence of African Americans in special education seems to suggest that even in a system that was supposed to serve some of the most marginalized students in the American educational system, the White privilege and racism that are ingrained in the fabric of American history and society are equally prevalent (Blanchett, 2006).

The genealogy of gifted education illustrates the field's racist underpinnings (Mansfield, 2015). Terman, the "father" of gifted education, and Hollingworth, the "mother" of gifted education, were public proponents of eugenics and used their privileged positions in academe to forward their pseudoscience (Mansfield, 2015). Binet and Simon, who developed the original IQ test in 1916, warned researchers and practitioners that people should only use their scale to determine opportunity and achievement gaps and subsequent curricular and pedagogical adaptations to help students catch up (Mansfield, 2015). Also, these two men showed that the IQ score patterns were correlated with wealth and opportunity. In France, their population and sample were almost entirely white. However, the Binet and Simon Scale clearly showed, even back then, that access to opportunity was what needed to be remedied (Mansfield, 2015). More recent discourse also shows similar effects of racist origins. Hernstein and Murray (1994) posit a causal effect between IQ and ability to generate wealth (or the propensity to criminal activity).

Further, like the eugenicists of centuries past, Hernstein and Murray (1994) claim IQ's inheritability, rejecting current and former research that shows strong relationships between context and performance on tests. Additionally, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) cannot present a universally agreed-upon definition of gifted or the best means for identifying children deserving of this label (NAGC, n.d.). Nor do they agree on the specific definition of intelligence or how to serve the gifted once appropriately identified. The federal

definition of giftedness is as follows: "children and youths who give evidence of higher performance capability...who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools to fully develop such capabilities" (NAGC, n.d.)

The above passages might lead us to believe that all people fall into two categories: gifted or not gifted. Moreover, these discourses show a distinct separation between the wealthy and the poor, along with the continued segregation of White and Black in terms of owning giftedness (Mansfield, 2015). Giftedness is forwarded as an inherited property with valuable resources and opportunities attached. Because of these viewpoints on gifted education, they position giftedness as a status label. It becomes a form of property with whiteness and wealth as the only people with the currency capable of attaining it. Thus, the gifted identification process is another type of classification procedure that simultaneously acts as an "aspect of identity and a property interest, something that can both be experienced and deployed as a resource" (Harris, 1993, p. 1734).

In schools, gifted African American students' experiences are often shaped by their teachers' perceptions and expectations. Teacher referral is often the first step in tracking; however, teachers are more likely to refer to Asian or White students to gifted education than their African American and Hispanic peers (Ford, Scott, Moore, & Amos, 2013). Teachers are often influenced by their perceptions and stereotypes of what characteristics are needed to be referred to as gifted education (Ford et. al, 2013). This usually means that African American and Latino students are overlooked because they may exhibit gifted behaviors differently (Mayes & Moore, 2016). Instead, African American students are met with lower expectations and exposure to less rigorous teaching than white students. After a teacher refers to a student, standardized assessments are often viewed as the best approach for evaluating students' potential success in gifted education. However, standardized tests are deficient in assessing the overall academic

potential of African American students. These tests, which have typically been normed on White populations, often reflect White middle-class backgrounds. These tests then become problematic as educators and professionals use such tests to assess gifted potential, assuming all students have an equal opportunity to learn and equal access to white, middle class backgrounds (Mayes & Moore, 2016). Continued use of these assessments preserves gifted programs' enrollment with primarily White and middle-class students (Ford et. al, 2013).

Another concept relevant to Black students' educational experiences is microaggressions. Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera (2009) proposed a classification of racial microaggressions where they described three types of racial transgressions: 1. Microassaults - conscious and intentional actions or verbal prejudices, such as using racial epithets, racist jokes, displaying nooses. Building on this framework, Ford, Scott, Moore & Amos (2013) provide examples of these types of microaggressions with each definition. An example of a gifted education microassault could deliberately compliment a gifted White student but not a gifted Hispanic student who earned the same grade or test score. 2. Microinsults - Verbal and nonverbal communication that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity, as well as demean culturally different students' heritage and racial identity (Sue et al., 2009). One example provided by Ford and colleagues (2013) of a microinsult is querying a gifted Black student how she or he got admitted in the gifted program, implying that she or he was admitted to fulfill some racial quota. 3. Microinvalidations - Communications that subtly exclude, negate, and nullify the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of Black and Hispanic students (Sue et al., 2009). For instance, Ford et al. (2013) explained that perhaps a microinvalidation could manifest as teachers who ask a Hispanic student where she or he was born to convey the message that the student could not

possibly be born in the United States. This suggests that the non-White student is a foreigner in his or her land.

Racial identity development is also a salient issue for gifted African American students. As students begin to understand who they are, they face negative messages, experiences, and stereotypes in the school environment. Students often notice that their racial/cultural perspectives, identities, and strengths are not represented in the curriculum or even the school as a whole, leading to dissociating from the school, underperforming, and withdrawing from school. In addition to messages from the school, societal influences also portray a significant role in shaping the racial identity development for gifted African American students. For example, Black intellectual inferiority's societal stereotype may cause African American students to disassociate from African American culture to avoid that negative stereotype. Students who internalize this message are vulnerable to the "stereotype threat," where these negative messages permeate their understanding of themselves, including their academic abilities and educational outcomes (Steele, 2011). However, when gifted African American students can achieve a positive sense of self, they are more likely to be academically successful, despite the stereotype threat (Mayes & Moore, 2016).

In addition to the stereotype threat, peer influences shape the racial identity development and educational outcomes for gifted African American students. Because students may not associate their academic success with African American culture, they may be accused of "acting white" and maybe ostracized from their peer group (Ogbu, 2003). Students who view African American culture as a source of strength and inspiration are more likely to develop a positive academic identity that empowers them to excel academically.

In this literature review, I have described various theories and followed various research studies surrounding schooling experiences, self-esteem and self-concepts for people of color, particularly for Black students, tracking, gifted/talented education, advanced courses, and culture. This literature helps understand the project that I have undertaken, which is a qualitative research study interviewing Oberlin College students of color about their experiences of racism in schooling, both implicit and explicit, experiences of taking advanced courses and being on the advanced track, and how both race and tracking influence student's self-concept and self-esteem. In the next chapter, I discuss in-depth the methods and procedures of interviewing, collecting participant data, transcribing, and analyzing qualitative interview data.

Chapter 3: Methods and Data

This project was initially designed as a mixed-methods study. This project's quantitative portion consisted of looking at secondary analyses of existing global self-esteem surveys that assessed the interactions between self-esteem and academic achievement. However, through research from mainly the textbooks on African American Psychology, it became clear that the way self-esteem is being defined and utilized in European Psychology differs from appropriately explaining self-esteem for people of color, particularly African Americans. Thus, it became clear that there should not be a general measure of self-esteem regarded as sufficient to examine this project. The constructs that I was looking to analyze would not be reliable or valid because comparing white students' self-esteem to Black students' self-esteem on a similar measure would not assess the same things due to self-esteem meaning two different things for the diverse populations. Thus, I removed the quantitative portion.

The rest of my research design involved qualitative data collection. The proposed project idea was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the end of September. After revisions, the proposal was sent, and the project was approved by the IRB at the end of October 2020. Next, to adequately recruit, compensate participants for their time, and transcribe in a timely manner, funding through Oberlin College's social sciences grant funding was required for this project. I received my Jerome Davis award at the end of December 2020. The grant funding was imperative because an important aspect of my research relied on the experiences of students of color to support me, a white student, in my honors thesis research. Thus, following interviews, participants were compensated for their time and emotional labor in sharing their experiences surrounding race in schooling.

After funding was received, recruitment strategies were implemented. Initially, physical flyers to put up around campus were proposed, however due to COVID-19 residential housing restrictions to dorms and academic buildings on campus, this strategy was not possible. Next, the Student Senate, the Multicultural Resource Center were contacted to add my project description and recruitment flyer in their weekly email newsletters. Additionally, the faculty in residence in the Afrikan Heritage House (A house), Candice Raynor, was contacted about sending the recruitment flyer to the residents living in A house.

Eligibility for this project involved being at least eighteen years of age, currently attending Oberlin College regardless of on campus or off campus status and identifying as a student of color who either took advanced courses or took remedial courses in high school. Regarding sampling strategies, the first three participants were part of a snowball sample of individuals that I knew and the following twelve were recruited through emails from Candice Raynor, the MRC, and Student Senate. Due to the nature of questioning from the in-depth interview guide and recalling situations in high school involving implicit biases, microaggressions, differential treatment from teachers, administration, and students, and stereotypes through post-secondary school experiences, it was important to consider and minimize recall bias. While first-year students were initially recruited, access was limited, and the sample was opened up later to students of any graduating year.

Participant interviews ranged in length from anywhere from 60 to 120 minutes on Zoom (virtual). Because gifted programs and advanced courses are tracked racially, I could better understand and get at these experiences via in-depth interviews. Some of my interview questions included: 1. Do you recall ever being treated differently in high school due to your race or ethnicity? Was this event part of a pattern? 2. How many other students of color were in your

advanced/remedial classes? Did you feel like you had to work harder in these classes compared to your peers? Did you find places where teachers supported you and valued you as a student? Were there ways that this event(s) of race-based treatment permanently affected the way that you interacted with school? Can you describe specific ways in which you received support that allowed you to end up where you are today and have the access you do to higher education? The entire list of interview questions are attached as list item one in the appendix.

Once all fifteen interviews were conducted (and audio recorded), each recorded interview was uploaded to a transcription service company, Temi, for conversion to written text. Temi's transcriptions are only around 80% accurate and needed to be parsed through manually for correctness. After interviews were transcribed, all transcripts were entered into MAXQDA, which is a qualitative coding and analysis software. Fifty-four code labels were generated to describe the overall qualitative data. These coded labels included both deductive and inductive codes. The five main deductive code labels are access to higher education, tracking, differential treatment, self, and demographic information. The demographic information for each participant and their corresponding pseudonyms are listed in the appendix as item two. Under each of these larger codes were the rest of the code labels. Some inductive codes include competing identities, tokenization and white comfortability, academic/advanced class self-esteem, immigrant family experiences, and acceptance of implicit racism. After all transcripts were read through and coded adequately, the total number of coded segments was 1084. The following three chapters summarize the main findings from my research.

Chapter 4: The Honors Track “Train Stop”: First Class Ticket or Left at the Station?

This chapter provides an introduction to the following three findings chapters. The overview of background information and concepts occurring in the school system provide crucial contexts that will lead to the subsequent understanding of discussions, events, mechanisms and processes at work, discussed in detail by participants in the next three chapters. Some important background concepts to understand are tracking, gifted and talented education, and how the system of tracking to higher level courses has racist implications on the school system at large infringing upon later access to higher education.

From the time period of late elementary school into early middle school, students are assessed and grouped by presumed abilities. These assessments set students up on specific educational tracks. In most school systems there are three tracks. The first track is the remedial track which involves students who have “fallen behind,” or in other words are not meeting grade level benchmarks. The second track is the “regular” track which involves on level grade work meaning the student is on par with standards and are neither behind or ahead of grade level work. The third track is the advanced track which involves performing above grade level work or being offered to participate in programs known as gifted and talented education.

Different tracks carry with them different stigmas, perceptions and positive and negative connotations. All tracks have later implications for high school and postsecondary educational experiences. Some study participants that I interviewed discussed, “feeling too good for regular classes.” They described feeling that they were smarter than topics being taught and wanted to be in the more advanced courses. Others felt that the advanced courses were what was expected of them and “that’s what you’re supposed to be doing.” Some sources of these pressures were from parents, older siblings already experiencing tracking, the pace and track the student was already

on - including what expectations they had for themselves, friends being in those classes, to get ahead and have a better chance in the college applicant pool, or the school system pushing it upon them.

Gifted and talented education, the advanced track, goes by many names varying by state. Some study participants called it GT, others called it TAG, some called it the gifted program, and all my participants from California called it G.A.T.E. The name GATE for the program holds particular symbolism as the tracking system, itself, operates as a gatekeeper and is meant to separate students and keep out others who did not initially make it in. Additionally, gifted and talented programs and advanced courses act in a gatekeeper pattern by ensuring that the students on the advanced track are prioritized, taken care of, valued, and are typically white emphasizing how the tracking system is also a racial gatekeeper. The gatekeeping leads to different access to future opportunities like college acceptances. One participant highlights below how schools and advanced courses operate:

“So, it was definitely kind of, I would say the pattern is the school only really took care of those in like the higher academic courses. Um, and for whatever reason, those in the higher academic courses were typically predominantly white. So, I guess you could say that they only took care of white people and that's why they were in those courses. Or you could say they only took care of the people in those courses and that's why. It could go either way. I'm not, I'm not sure, like which institution was more important to them. And it could have just been all of it because there was also the class factor too.”

The advanced tracking system acts as a racial gatekeeper denoting which students the school system thinks are important and worthy, which then determines which students receive the most educational access. This gatekeeping process can also be seen by this participants quote:

“The IB students were all the privileges that you have: being white, being upper-class, being attractive, all of them were our IB class. They were kind of trumpeted around as being the pride of my high school. Like even my senior year, they

would announce when people had gotten into colleges, you could submit it and they would announce it over the Intercom. This was cool except that the only people who knew where you could submit this to were the IB students. So, other people are getting into colleges. I had friends who were getting into like Georgia State, Kennesaw State, and they're super proud of themselves because they didn't think they were going to go to college. They were so happy, but they're not getting put over the Intercom. The people who are getting put over the Intercom are the white people who are going to like Yale, Georgetown and stuff and those are the only names that are getting announced.”

This quote highlights that students in advanced courses are valued by the school system because they are held within the gates that the advanced track racial gatekeeper provides. The white IB students' successes were announced to the entire school, while the black, regular class admission to a state school was dismissed.

Secondly, a train analogy can be used to highlight the issues of implementing tracking. At a period of time in early middle school, the advanced track train leaves the station. Once this train has left the stop, there are very limited opportunities to get onboard at a later time. This system leads to very limited access to advanced classes later on in school, further disadvantaging some students in their access to higher education.

Tracking is a practice that becomes normalized, ingrained into the student throughout their school experiences, inevitable and natural. Theoretically anyone on paper during course registration is presented with all the courses the school offers. One participant said exactly that:

“PI: Do you think that your peers that weren't in honors had access to take those honors or that like wasn't even on their radar?”

Interviewee: I think that there were, I think on paper, they still were presented the same options, but I don't think that they were encouraged by any means. Um, and I don't think that they were given any sort of indication that it was something they could do, even if it was something they hadn't done in the past. Like, it was sort of one of those, once you jump on the honors train, like so long as you continue to prove you can handle it, you're just on it. And if you missed that train, then you're never going to get on it. So I feel like there was a divide at a certain point and I don't know exactly what grade the point would have been, but there was a point where kids just, if they weren't in honors were never encouraged to try to get into it going forward.”

The specific track for most of these students was known by the time that they reached high school because it started in elementary school and carried forward - leading to their participation in advanced courses.

Participants were already socialized and prepared for such courses and experiences.

There appeared to be a linear relationship between gifted classes, advanced classes and access to higher education. This participant described this phenomenon occurring within his school below:

“The difference in me and my teammates happened before high school, maybe back when they did the gifted test or whatever. I don't think that's all that it was, but I think that was a big factor. By the time we hit high school, everybody thought of me up here. I didn't have to change anyone's minds. All I had to do was just like stay up here. Whereas, I had a lot of teammates who like, when they entered high school, people are like, "oh, here they are, you know, they're like, you know, that's the, the gen ed kid who got suspended last year in eighth grade, um, and started to fight during football practice." Like that was like the labels that some of my teammates had coming into high school and it's like, you're starting down here, people don't expect you. You either have to change everybody's mind or you just stay here. And I think like a lot of my friends, ya know, just kind of stayed here.”

In addition to describing tracking and getting stuck on those tracks, this participant discussed his reasons for someone staying on the same track - it is easy because the student is on the same track for a long time, making it familiar and comfortable, and change might bring complicated social situations and alter peer's perceptions about the student.

While getting stuck on a track is definitely one possibility for many students, another participant talks about what it is like to jump tracks and the extra work on the student that it takes to achieve such “train track change”. Extra work included having to perform extremely well in your regular class to get noticed by the teacher for a higher track recommendation, or having to spend time during your summers off from school taking additional courses to “catch up” or “get

ahead” depending on what lens that person is looking through. Another participant talked about how much easier it was to already be on the advanced track:

“Yeah, I would say it's easier to start off in AP classes and just continue your journey in the AP classes track then having to work your way up to an AP class.”

This quote is significant because students tracked into advanced classes early on are given the benefit of the doubt from the start versus having to prove themselves to be considered for the higher tracks.

A different participant talks about having an easier time in school because they got to “catch the train” early and how this course helped them end up at Oberlin College due to an event that happened very early on in their educational experiences:

“I feel like I latched on to what I could do like reading, liking school, achievement, positive reinforcement and I did well in school, like pretty early on maybe. I just kind of caught the train really early. It's like a way to say maybe because obviously I know that if I had struggled, even into second grade, then I might've been like my brother and ended up like him, because he had chances as well. I lived in an Asian neighborhood and I went to summer camp with my Asian best friend. We met this girl counselor when we were like 10 years old. She went to Oberlin College and we thought she was so cool. Then I moved to Georgia and no one knew that Oberlin existed. I don't know if anyone from my school has ever gone to Oberlin. I brought Oberlin with me from the North and my Northern experiences. I got good grades because I kind of like stumbled into it. And they were good enough to go to Oberlin. So that's how I wound up at Oberlin. I just know how a 10 year old could go to camp in New Jersey, and someone could say Oberlin, and that word could stick in the back of their minds.”

This participant discusses how catching the train and track allowed them to stick with their ten year old memory of an introduction to a college influential figure that stuck with them throughout their childhood even though they had moved to a completely different geographical location that lacked access and information for them to Oberlin College. However, because of tracking and the educational path that they were set on, they were able to receive that access to

higher education. Another example of the track being set pretty early on for a participant is when she described access to college and tracking like marriage:

“I also just like my generally easy time in school compared to other kids, like, it was just sort of like this track that I knew. It's kind of like when you say like, “Oh, when I get married someday everyone, I have kids someday.” Like I knew, “Oh, when I'm in college someday,” that like, it was just always on the table.”

Additionally, other participants discussed how they just stumbled into honors because of the types of students they were and the type of neutral attention they received from their teachers:

“I think that focus at home was definitely a part of why I was able to, to sort of catch the train. I think another part of it too, was that I just behaviorally did not do a lot to draw attention to myself. I was the person that only speaks when spoken to, only talks when is called on, like that model student behavior, and that just meant that I got lumped in with the kids who were moving fast. I think part of it was that there weren't behaviors that teachers tend to pay attention to that would have made them less apt to like give me the academic time cause they were like, "Oh, we don't have to group you over here with the kids that we have to yell at for talking. So you can just keep reading." I think that was kind of part of it. I think it was just one of those, I guess I hate to say like personality things, but I guess just kind of, I had like a real fear of authority and so I just didn't do anything that could draw attention and then that meant that I just didn't have to get pulled aside for other things and could get extra worksheets and then be in honors.”

Teachers were not looking for behavioral infractions if they were not occurring and just simply existing allowed that participant to get ahead. Another participant who identifies as biracial talked about how her lighter skin probably gave her, sadly, an advantage in the honors track train system over other students that looked different.

“I can't deny that lighter skin privilege is not also a part of probably what gave me even just the initial advantage of like the neutral attention, because they didn't automatically look and say like, "Oh, she's probably gonna act out." And like, there was not that anticipation of an issue with me. So then they didn't have confirmation bias, or look for one, they just were like, "Okay, if she's not doing anything, then we'll just keep her moving through the ranks." So I can't, I can't deny that that is also probably a part of it. I think it would be really ridiculous to not recognize that at this point.”

The advanced tracking system operates to keep students of colors from boarding the honors train in many ways. Within the school-to-prison pipeline, teachers operate based on implicit biases and tend to discipline students of color at far higher rates. This practice takes students away from the classroom and further divides them into a lower track because it simply reduces access to instruction time. This inability to board the honor train could also be happening because teachers are incorrectly assessing students of color's abilities (perceiving them to be lower than what they actually are), and are not recognized as commonly as white students' abilities. Many different factors are at play creating segregated educational tracks with implications for access to higher education later in schooling. Lastly, a participant discusses how the tracking system has been instilled in students from such a young age that by the time students are in high school, they are on their own and "stuck." Those tracks and course lists are set in stone. However, even when districts do try to create opportunities and apply for grants meant for students of color, those resources are being allocated to areas without students of color completely negating the whole initiatives of receiving funding and grants for such students in the first place.

"I feel like the problem is that there was no pipeline between those kids. I happened to enter later, but these kids were steered like by their social systems, like around achieving well in school, and that was very ingrained in the entire system from the very beginning. The kids who didn't do well when they were younger and like never really transitioned over. And then in our school, we had very high diversity levels, very strong diversity numbers that got us grants and money and recognition. But if they did diversity polls in just the higher level classes, it'd be abysmal. So like all the money, all the grants that we got for diversity got put towards our higher level classes and our IB, and science programs. The school itself had so many Black students truly, but like those IB programs, AP programs, science programs, really are being funded because of this. But then in AP/IB/Science, we're almost devoid of Black students, which is like, just an awful fact."

In conclusion, tracking has profound influences on school experiences, later access to higher education, and beyond despite being implemented early in the educational system. While some interventions to increase diversity numbers in schools have been initiated, they continue to fall short. Students of color are missing out on the advanced courses, likely due to their tracks that were determined years prior. The next three chapters delve deeper into the impacts of tracking and advanced courses experiences as it relates to racial identity, experiences of racism and school segregation, self-esteem, experiences at school and sources of support and how these support systems affect college and career choices, and how access to private high schools creates greater divides in educational experiences and the ability to access a liberal arts education.

Chapter 5: Resurrecting Plessy versus Ferguson: Tracking and Within-School Racial Segregation

This chapter primarily focuses on study participants' experiences in advanced courses and the types of observations students noticed within their classes. A t specific observation was that school demographics were not being reflected in their AP and gifted and talented course tracks. This observation was made by several participants and occurred at primarily white high schools as well at diverse schools albeit differently. At the primary white high schools, students of color were underrepresented in advanced courses; at diverse schools, white students were overrepresented in those courses. Additionally, because of the different tracking systems set up within schools, this misrepresentation led to high levels of racial segregation.

Some participants expressed feelings of tokenization in their advanced classes as being the only or one of very few students of color in those classes. Because of these feelings of tokenization, the students elected to not take advanced classes at some point throughout their schooling career. Other observations of study participants involved the differences between their advanced classes and their regular classes. Students noticed differences in how the classrooms were managed, in teacher expectations and rules, in assumptions made about students such as who are the “good” versus the “bad” kids, and in how preferential treatment was being given to students in higher level courses. Additionally, participants discussed how some students in advanced courses were “given up” on because they were simply overlooked or weren’t outshining their peers. Other participants discussed that students of color in their schools weren’t pushed or encouraged to reach their potential, which could explain why they were missing in those advanced courses. On the other hand, some participants talked about schools over-pushing their students into advanced courses. These participants postulated on the reasons for this

practice - their schools resided in low-income districts where advanced course enrollment was a way for the school to receive additional funding.

Study participants expressed various reasons for wanting to take advanced courses, regardless of whether they ended up in an International Baccalaureate (IB) program or took Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Some participants expressed feeling an elitist attitude and looking down on any classes that were not advanced courses. They voiced opinions that they were too good to be put in any other courses other than AP, IB or honors classes. Others shared that they took the advanced classes that they did because their counselors advised it or their parents pushed it. Some participants stated that having older siblings already on the honors track resulted in them (as the younger sibling) being expected to do the same. Other participants indicated that they enrolled in those honor classes because they wanted to be around their friends. Other participants talked about being more intentional about taking honors and advanced courses. These students had a strong desire to get into good colleges, boost their GPAs, and/or receive college credit; they also wanted to challenge themselves or thought the classes would be interesting topics to learn about.

At schools that were predominantly white, students of color were underrepresented in honors and advanced courses. One participant described her take on the racial makeup of these advanced courses:

“I’d say overpopulated with white students, just because there were so many other Black students that I know that definitely could have taken at least one or two APs. And, if they had the proper support, it would have happened. I just very much distinctly remembered being the only Black student in AP US and initially I had another Black friend who was in it but dropped the class after the add/drop period. And I was like, “Oh great. Now I’m the only one.” I don’t know if our school had more services or things to help or just anything conscious of trying to keep students of color in some of these classes or maybe doing advanced classes that are not just AP or something like that. Because our school with college and things like that, it’d be like, well, AP is more just if you’re going to a very

prestigious place, like liberal arts, just because you need high scores on the AP test to make sure that it counts. But if you're trying to go to maybe a state school or, um, the community college, you can just easily take community college credit classes and that easily transfers. So because of that, you can tell there was a distinction of the way they like were marketing that the two types of advanced classes, which shifted just the stats of who was in these AP classes and they were mostly white students.’’

This participant additionally gets at the point regarding gatekeeping and tracking mentioned in the last chapter about advanced courses and keeping students of color from being in them.

Students of color were steered towards community college classes presumably because educators thought they would be more likely to attend community college than the “prestigious, liberal arts” colleges, which looks more favorably at advanced classes for admissions.

Other study participants describe attending very diverse high schools where one might expect more equitable rates of participation among students across racial categories in advanced classes; however participants continued to report there were very few students of color in their advanced classes. These low enrollment numbers led to the overrepresentation of white students in these courses compared to the school demographics at large. One participant describes this trend below:

“I would say that regularly in my honors classes, I would have like one or two Black students, maybe like maybe two at the max, like one or two, Latinx, students and like four or five Asian students, which seems like a lot. But when you think about like, but those that I feel like that would be like the max per class and then like just the rest would be white. And like that demographic is just so different compared to the rest of the school. Like the point was that white people are definitely in the minority at my school, but I was in an honors program and white people were the majority there and very few people of color in that program. ”

Another participant described a similar pattern, but notes a different demographic in the student population. This participant notes that even though there are very few white students in her school, all of those white students could be found in the IB classes:

“If there was a white student going to my school. It was because they were doing IB. It was never, for any other reason they were, they came that's all the way.”

Further segregation relating to advanced course experiences in schools was witnessed in registering for classes with counselors and other initiatives set up by administrators.

“Participant: The school kind of separated off and like their little, “You guys have futures, and you don’t.” They just like pushed us away from them. It was like a different experience, um, just depending on the kind of experience you were there at school for.

PI: Would you say if students push each other away, or would you say it was something coming from administration and teachers, like who was instigating this kind of divide?

Participant: I think it was unintentionally just the way they had set things up that like, we just started to separate ourselves because when they would register us for classes, if you were just going through on the normal track, you were pushed to join clubs or academies, but if you were there to be an IB student, they wanted us to focus on IB. So they separated us. We just didn't really mix with other students who weren't doing IB since we didn't have those classes, with them or extracurricular activities that they tended to do.”

Whether intentional or not, the school tracking programs set students up to not interact with one another, further dividing the experiences students would have in their schooling. This divide is especially when teachers are making assumptions about the kinds of students on various tracks.

Another participant described his school and the relationship between him and his teammates schooling as existing in two different worlds:

“I think it's just how they met us. By the time my high school coach met me, I was already an honors student. I was coming off of two years on like the Dean's list. So to speak in middle school that's how they met me, whereas how they met some of the teammates that I'm thinking of were the troublemaker kids, but incredible athletes. Like, that's kind of the narrative that was around these guys, whereas me, it was like he's the total package. It was kind of bizarre, I guess, to hang out with my football teammates, on school campus, because we just existed in different worlds. They knew all the security guards, they were the ones who would take them to detention or write them up for detention. Whereas, for me, I knew one security guard until my senior year because it was just the guy who was out there whenever my bus pulled up. So I knew him, but I didn't know that we had more, I thought it was just the one. Even like teachers, we'd walk around

during lunch, and I'm saying hi to this teacher, but they're saying hi to this teacher. And neither of us knows who the other teachers are because of that separation."

This interviewee discussed the implications of tracking as it relates to social identity. Because his teammates were disciplined more frequently, they were familiar with the school's security guards. However, my interviewee did not know the guards since he was disciplined less frequently because he participated in advanced classes. He simply was not exposed to these faculty members. Similarly, the teachers he knew were vastly different from the teachers his teammates knew further highlighting within school segregation amongst different school tracks.

Other students mentioned feeling like they had to take on more in their classes because of their race. Some students said these feelings of burden were especially evident in their advanced English and history classes. These participants expressed that white participants looked to students of color for responses, reactions, and answers. This experience is an example of tokenization, which is an aspect of implicit racism, and is demonstrated in the above situation by looking to people of color to explain the histories and acts of racism within our nation. This type of behavior further alienated these students. Tokenism will be discussed more in depth in the following chapters as it relates to participants' experiences with dueling identities, and being one of the only students of color in their advanced courses.

Another participant discussed turning down being in the TAG program or even taking a single TAG seminar because they felt like the program wasn't fair for all students. Similarly, another participant completely turned down the IB program at his high school and changed the course of his schooling based on experiences with his counselor surrounding feelings of tokenism. He describes the situation more in detail below:

"But when I was asked by our school counselor to join the IB program. She called me into her office to talk to me about this, which was like, "I think your grades are there, I think you can do it." And my mom had always said that I had to do the

IB program if I was going to be at this school. So like we kind of were expecting this at some point in time. And when it happened, we had this conversation and I don't remember the exact wording anymore, but the way that she was talking about the IB program and specifically like me in the IB program, it sounded very much like tokenism to me, even at that point in time when I wasn't like, as, as aware of words like tokenism and microaggressions and all the complexities that go into like race in America, it's still like, it just didn't sit well with me. And I ended up not doing the IB program because of that among other reasons, but that definitely was like a very clear factor for me, for why I ended up not signing up the IB program. So like, that's like a very clear, like shift in my academic career.”

This participant said that he would have been the only Black person in the entire IB program.

Participating in the IB program was not something that he wanted for himself. The next best option, he felt, was to take AP courses. While slightly better in racial makeup than the IB program at his school, the AP courses still had few students of color in those classes. He said there was at least one in those AP classes and that was significant enough to persuade him to not do the IB program as well because he would not be the sole person of color.

Many participants brought up various observations as they compared their experiences in their regular classes to experiences in their advanced classes. One participant mentioned advanced teachers having higher expectations for their students:

“I feel like the teachers probably had higher standards. I was in regular level math for all my years in high school and I definitely feel like there is a higher standard and like teachers like not necessarily respect their students more, but I feel like there's just a different vibe sort of, um, like almost more like not professional, but like less of a babysitter vibe.”

Another participant discussed feeling like there were different sets of expectations, treatment, and rules in her honors classes compared to regular classes at her school and described how the race of teachers could also have influenced regular class teaching:

“Definitely. I feel like we had some AP teachers who were well-known in our school to have very hard classes. So they came in with the expectation to be like, “Hey, this is really like a college class.” Looking back, like I can see that it's partly true. So like, which is sad. Cause like if you don't have access to these people and you've never taken a class with them who knows where you might end up because some of the regular classes are treated as just like, you know, we don't

give too much, we don't care about them as much. If your students are rowdy in that class, it's just, like the hotbed of drama and all sorts of things and like white students, the white teachers, not being able to connect at all to those students. But the AP was treated as something that's so close to college, meaning that you have to respect everyone, you have to do this. There's just a very different set of rules.”

A different participant mentioned that there were different levels of respect between students and teachers depending on the class track, with teachers imbuing students on the AP track with more esteem than other students. However, she gets at how she could not truly discuss the experiences in regular classes because she had been on the honors track for so long. This statement again highlights the segregation of tracks and gatekeeping. She explains this further here:

“My entire high school career was always something advanced. I would not have like a non honors way to like experience things, except for the fact that like, if I went in to go take a test in a non honors course, if I had missed a day or something and they were like, “Oh, you need to go to this classroom to take the test.” The level of intention was off in those classes. Teachers couldn't be like, “Oh, you're in school and you want to do something” like they couldn't pull on that part so students were being disrespectful. They'd be like calling teachers by their first name. When that obviously wasn't cool with the teacher. There was just less motivation to keep them in line than like, when I like the classes I took, like, we were still like disrespectful, but it was like different because we just had different levels the way the teacher respected us and the way we respected the teacher versus lower levels of respect from both sides.”

Another participant discussed being an assistant teacher during his senior year of high school as part of “senior experience/internships/real world experiences.” He talked about visibly noticing two of his teachers’ burnout and lowered affect in classes. He said they were tired and you could tell from how they are teaching:

“I would say there was a general sort of exhaustion maybe felt by teachers that had to teach the general ed classes just the way that I saw her sort of energy, enthusiasm, all of that, for like her general ed classes versus her honors classes was like massively different. I kind of noticed it with some other teachers too, like one of my favorite teachers, Ms. Radcliffe, she was so sweet, but she even had it and she was, she was a Black teacher. Ms. Reese was white, but Ms. Radcliffe was Black. The energy, enthusiasm and patience with which she approached my

AP English class versus when she approached her general level English classes, it was just like very clearly noticeable to me. Higher level classes definitely just got the attention and the energy, like Ms. Reese, there would be times where she just wouldn't teach a lesson. People would come in, they'd be rowdy. They weren't more rowdy in my opinion than me and my friends when we would come into our AP classes. But normally in the AP classes, the teachers just were like, "okay settle down. It's time to learn." But there are times when I saw Ms. Reese, just didn't even make the effort. She just be like, "there are worksheets up front, get them, turn them in at the end of the class. And that was kind of it."

Additionally, he talked about classroom and behavior management of regular classes and how teachers tended to corral their students rather than teaching them curriculum and content. He also described the ways in which race is related to tracking and school segregation as well as how he experienced these two issues at his school. This finding is another example of how tracking and advanced course experiences act as gatekeepers, and exclude students of color from those courses. His discussion is below:

"I think it was the kind of assumption that maybe the good kids were in the higher level classes and the bad kids were in the lower level classes. Um, and obviously that's tied to race, you know? Um, and at my school it was very clearly tied to race. Like I wish I had like a yearbook, I could hold up to the screen to show you because like the IB class was all white, gen ed was all Black. I mean, it's just crazy how, how divided the school was that way. Um, so I think it just is kind of one of those things where it's like, you know, you internalize the idea that like, if I go into my AP class and they're out of control, I can tell them to calm down and they'll listen because they're the good kids. Whereas if I go into my general ed classes and they're out of control, they won't listen to me, even if I try. So I'm not even going to try. I think that's sort of the, the mentality that a lot of the teachers had."

In conclusion, this chapter expands on the ways that tracking practices further segregate within schools because of the low numbers of students of color in advanced courses. These low numbers of students of color in advanced classes contributes to feelings of tokenism from teachers and administration. These feelings are further complicated by students feeling like they need to advance themselves in school to be able to access higher education regardless of how they got onto the advanced track in the first place. In addition to within school segregation,

differences arise among how teachers are teaching and feeling about their courses and how those behaviors and feelings are implicitly tied to race and how students are thus treated.

Chapter 6: “A Different Kind of Black”: Dueling Identities, Isolation, and Self-Esteem

This chapter discusses the emergence of competing identities among students of color in relation to tracking: an educational scholarly identity and a student’s racial identity. In my cohort of interviewees, this dueling identity has been particularly prominent among Black or biracial students with one Black parent, who have been tracked into advanced courses, have done well in high school, and gone on to attend college. The language used by study participants to describe this identity is a “fractured personality.” These students simultaneously have developed feelings of cultural dissonance, isolation, and alienation when interacting with other Black peers Black community who didn’t have the same support, were not tracked or pushed to their fullest potential, and thus faced limited access to higher education. Some participants have discussed feeling as though they could not find their footing. Others have referred to this identity struggle as being “a different kind of Black,” or “too white and not Black enough.” Coping with this dueling identity has affected self-concept and self-esteem negatively. Some participants have felt tokenism and pressure to be examples of Black excellence; others have felt like they could not find racial validation among other Black students. Other study participants, particularly those from Asian backgrounds, have discussed focusing their identity and self-esteem on trying to fit in with white students. Additionally, other participants have talked about how being articulate, approachable, and able to code-switch allowed them to fit in better with their white peers and teachers.

The emergence of a fracturing personality, as the participant below describes, was complicated. It involved separating oneself into parts and leaving one not really knowing who one is and where one fits in. He described feeling like he had to be two different people because his social circles varied dramatically depending on the context and situation he was involved in.

In school and class it was one personality, and during sports it was another. The participant detailed his experiences further:

“Another big thing though for me was I never really knew where I fit in high school, from like a social standpoint. I knew I was Black, I was very aware of the fact that I was Black. I was also a very good athlete in high school. I was a captain of the football team, class president, I was a popular person in high school. I loved receiving that kind of love, but I didn't know. It kind of almost, it felt like it presented too many options maybe. What ended up happening was I kind of ended up doing was like fracturing myself. So I had my 7:30 am to 3:30 pm self, who was like the academic, in AP classes, the one mingling with the white students and the smart Black, Mexican, and Asian students and stuff like that. But then once 3:30 pm hit, it was time for practice and then I became this whole other self, and I never really had the chance to sort of blend those two aspects of myself. None of the people I was in my classes with were on the football team. But on the other side, I didn't want to drop down, you know, if I'm sitting here, doing well in AP and honors classes. So I kind of stayed pretty fractured that way. I didn't want to drop to gen ed cause I thought I was better. Also I had that kind of self doubt. I was like, I'm Black, but I'm not like gen ed Black.”

On top of feeling misplaced and unsure of oneself, the participant also described how experiences in school regarding his identity could have been a lot easier if he had seen more people of color, particularly Black students in his advanced course. It might have been easier to “blend” the two versions of himself, as he stated in the previous quote. It was extremely difficult for him to not feel like he could be himself completely no matter the context, situation, or circumstance.

Another participant described realizing how a dichotomy in school existed between a social identity and an educational identity. She characterized her experiences in AP and honors courses as creating a “bubble” between realizing the experiences and realities of her Black peers. The term “bubble” expressed by the interviewee here acts as a synonym for the gatekeeping mechanisms in advanced course experiences. This is a recurring theme that will present itself again and again throughout this paper. The same participant also discussed how this dichotomy has had a permanent effect on her views:

“I find myself having to unlearn a lot of the non-educational aspects of schooling. I was really fortunate and privileged to go to schools that had good funding and had teachers, faculty and staff that really cared about students and that I was in a supportive household and all of that was great for helping me believe that I could be in AP classes and be in honors classes. But I feel in a sense that that bubble of being in honors and AP like really shielded and insulated me from realities of existing as a Black woman. And I think that's like a kind of dumb exchange to have to make. I think it's odd that that's a dichotomy that exists between social identity and educational identity for me and how for a lot of other kids that was not a luxury they had. In my perceptions of how everything is arranged and how people have gotten to the places where they are because it just looks a lot different most times than how I got here.”

This participant expressed the frustrations of the identity dichotomy and how she recognizes her privilege in even being able to have the dichotomized personality in the first place.

Other study participants discussed other identity issues surrounding their Blackness at school especially as it related to fitting in with their Black peers and community. One participant discussed how she very much acknowledges her Blackness and faces it every day, because she didn't fit in with the traditional “Black stereotype,” and how she couldn't even find her place:

“People used to call me an Oreo, which is like Black on the outside, white on the inside. I feel like people were just saying that because I was smart, I was kind of nerdy, and I just didn't fit their stereotype of what a Black person was, even though I'm clearly Black and I have to face the repercussions of that every day. And so I think, I think I struggled with like, like finding my place in the Black community, I guess.”

Another participant described how attending a predominantly white school affected her confidence in her racial identity and ability to fit in among peers. She recognized that it was hard to connect to one's Blackness when there were so few Black at school to socialize with and how the demographics of school itself created problems for finding common ground with other Black people:

“My middle school was mostly white and when I went to middle school, it was like hard for me to connect to my Black side just because like that wasn't the norm that wasn't what people liked. So it took me a while in high school to get back to I'm a Black person and I can do these Black things with other Black

people. Um, so I didn't really connect with Black people until like my junior year.”

A different participant discussed how the interactions of their childhood affected their friend choices and people they interacted with until they resided in a completely different geographical location. At that time, their awareness of their racial identity became more apparent to them as compared to when they were living in the North. While some of their choices were intentional and based on their experiences with Black people when they were younger, struggling to feel comfortable in their racial identity affected their ability to find their footing in a different Black community while in high school. They discuss further how they lost their footing below:

“I didn't really notice it until I went to a very small Christian school until like fifth grade. And then with like a few Black kids. But those kids just happened to always be mean to me, like from the very beginning, like those kids, like they were the cheetah girls and there could only be three cheetah girls and only three people on the play structure. And it couldn't be me. So I hated them. And I liked my cousins, but like I went to the Christian school. So I would always go to town like in my little uniform and like be a little nerd. And then I went to public school and I met kids and then those kids were mostly like Asian or white. It wasn't a racial problem as much as it was until I got to like the South for eighth grade. And by the time I got to the South, I had already very firmly planted myself onto the, like the non-Blacks like non, like higher, higher achieving side. And like there was like nothing really to think about or do about it. I could try but like I had no instant natural repertoire with like other Black students that I could like fall back on.

Another participant also felt like she couldn't find her footing around her Black peers and felt like she didn't belong in the Black community. This feeling of not belonging was also complicated by her own internalized struggles associated with imposter syndrome stemming from her racial identity. Additionally, she mentioned how she had to ignore aspects of her racial identity when hanging out with friends and how this behavior could have contributed to her internalized feelings of being an imposter. This observation connected similarly to the fractured

personality of one participant mentioned above, where depending on the people this participant was surrounded by, she had to ignore some aspects of her identity.

“I think resulting from middle school and how other students made me feel like I didn't belong in the BSU in high school. I was still struggling with that part of my identity but it was more like internal. Everybody in BSU and the other Black students welcomed me with open arms, but I still wasn't sure if I really felt like I fit in there. Also partly because of differences in speaking and I would usually just speak in like, I don't know, standard English, other students, other Black students would sometimes speak more like with like Black English or like some mixture of code meshing. So I kind of internalized it in high school and didn't lean on the Black community for support as much. But at the same time, I wasn't getting support from my white friends or white teachers, the extra support that I might've needed. And at the same time struggling with ignoring part of my identity around other friends.”

The majority of Black participants revealed feeling not “Black enough,” feeling like the not “correct kind of Black,” or feeling not “regular track classes Black”. These feelings manifested in various ways. The below participant expressed not knowing how to deal with not being the “stereotypical Black man”; he felt that it was easier to have two separate personalities than commit to and potentially face repercussions for being “a different kind of Black.”

“It felt like that was like a different type of Black than I was. And I didn't really feel comfortable or want to commit to that. So I ended up just kind of staying split. I could commit to that type of Black when I was playing football or when I was playing basketball and then I could be like my type of Black when I was in school. Now in retrospect, I realized that neither of those were who I am. I'm a combination of the two and it's a whole other thing.”

Other participants expressed struggling with their identity and self-esteem which stemmed from issues of fitting in socially with other white students. Some participants expressed feeling “dumber” than they actually were when they were in high school. These feelings arose because they thought their white peers were naturally so much smarter than they were, which deeply impacted their academic self-concept. However, both participants recognized now that the white students had privileges that were not obvious to the participants at the time. It is hard to

keep yourself in perspective compared to your peers as a teenagers especially because self-esteem during high school is intertwined in a highly competitive atmosphere, where you're always judging yourself to the "best," or "smartest" peers. One participant detailed her struggles below:

"For some, I know, I think the idea was that like, in my classes, there were just some people who were naturally smarter, which, um, I know now is completely untrue because these people were had private tutors or they were taking separate classes and they have like connections to college students who would tutor them for free and so they didn't have to worry about the money. One of my friends, she's white, she was also an IB and she is like an amazing writer. I was always thinking, "Oh, she just must naturally be that way, she's just a naturally gifted writer." And like I couldn't get to that level. And it was actually because when she was younger, her parents had her read like scholarly academic books and had her listen to NPR and stuff. So I was like, "Oh, okay. So it's, you know, it's, it's not like some people are naturally good at this. They're just kind of groomed in this way."

This participant understands that the privileges white participants often have over their peers of color are typically created from outside connections or parental influences.

Another participant discussed how they felt like their entire self-concept and self-esteem was based on their academic performance, class enrollment, and sense of belonging. Their AP classes were overpopulated with white students and required them to fit in with what being "white" meant:

"Like, honestly I think it was what my self esteem was based off of, because I didn't really have anything else. My identity was basically school based for most of growing up. That was what I poured my time into, and that was where I knew I could be good at something and be respected for it. Yeah, so definitely it was a huge part of my identity growing up."

Additionally, "fitting in" was defined as being the cool, "whitish" Asian and separating themselves from their Asian identity to increase how they saw themselves:

"PI: How would you say that your experiences with differential treatment, if any, affected your self esteem?"

Participant: I don't know. I feel like I spent so much of my energy and time focusing on being the cool, whitish Asian that that was where I poured my energy.

And so I was focused on gaining self-esteem from that specific identity, if that makes sense.”

Distancing themselves from their racial identity meant not having to face bullying and discrimination in schools. Adopting the “cool, whitish Asian,” identity in a manner was a coping strategy.

Seeing how other Asians were treated very early on in their schooling certainly affected how this participant situated themselves within their racial identity and how they behaved:

“In elementary school there were like two types of Asians in my class. There were me and my other friend, who is Chinese. We had American born parents and were relatively assimilated into white culture. Then there were one at least two Asian, who had immigrant parents and spoke Chinese and were like what the Asian community is called, fresh off the boat. They were not cool and made fun of and I feel like a lot of my elementary school experiences were spent trying to define myself, not as that, so that I would be cool and socially accepted. So, essentially later on in my school, there was a lot of bullying that would happen against one of the people who definitely had the immigrant born parents, and just like really bad bullying. So I think that kind of informed a lot of my experiences later. I definitely think that there was a dichotomy between like the Asian, like the Asian community that was whitish and then like the community that was really not. The Asians that were assimilated in white culture were cool and those not assimilated in white culture, we're not cool. And so I think a lot of my school career was spent, like making sure it was over here, where I'd be perceived as cool.”

Fitting in with their white peers also meant facing microaggressions, implicit biases, and tokenism on top of handling and splitting multiple aspects of their identity. Below are two examples of how interviewees expressed how they operated within predominantly white spaces.

These experiences impacted how they acted, or did not act, or helped them because they were surrounded by whiteness and the implications of getting ahead within a white dominated space:

“Being around white people or just people who are just like, “Hey, do this,” or being treated the way that I was treated, especially in high school and just being treated like, “Oh, wow, she's so smart. She's going to do this. She's so articulate.” People are more willing to help you if they don't perceive you a certain way. And because I've been to a PWI my whole life and now still, I can code switch like very easily. In several different spaces, I am different people basically. So that ability and ability to face through, which shouldn't be an ability, you know, we

shouldn't have to change who we are, but because I knew how to at a young age in like elementary school level to flip flop pretty quickly. So that skill also helped just make sure that like white people wanted to listen to me or, at least wanted to stand with me for a few minutes and be like, "Oh wow, whatever, blah, blah, blah, blah." So that also has definitely helped with social circles or the things I could even add to my resume."

Additionally this participant talked about how school socialization set her up to learn how to act in a predominantly white space and how tokenism and pressure existed. She briefly mentioned having to "defend Black people" in class, which further alienated her from her peers. She felt the pressure to take on the burden and emotional labor of educating white people about their contributions to racism and their racist behavior whether it be implicit, due to ignorance, or some other cause:

"So I was positioned especially just the way I was socialized in that school district. Like I was the token Black friend, the really smart Black kid, the one that's like palatable enough or whatever. So people would kind of just say things and then didn't expect me to say things about it. In ninth grade we were having a discussion. I don't know exactly what we were talking about, but we're having some discussion about race in an English class and it just wasn't going well. And there were only two, me and another Black person in the room and we had to kind of defend all Black people for all of time, you know, because we could just tell that like, no one was getting it. So there's constant things like that. But, from a student perspective, it wasn't bad. Like, because I had a lot of white friends, like that was kind of like a safety net or whatever. So like things weren't going to get to me, like if you're in a Black friend group, um, then you're just going to be seen as loud. You're going to be seen as this"

While this participant expressed how her socialization processes were influenced by often existing within predominantly white spaces, she also acknowledged that because of the society that we live in, some of these skills are necessary to function and assimilate better into "American" culture. These skills later set her up for successes such as resume building, or not being disciplined as frequently because she was surrounded by her white friends.

Another participant expressed feelings of tokenism as it related to her school district at large. She felt the need to be an example of black excellence for her school district, which added

unnecessary pressure to feel like she had to not only prove her academic success to herself but also needing to prove herself for the school as a whole. She said the support from teachers was a double-edged sword because, while they were encouraging her, they were also operating from a place of need - to have a “success story” for the school. She admitted during the interview that when she received her acceptance letter to Oberlin College, she felt extremely relieved. She was relieved because the high school could have on its record her achievements, and she could release the weight and burden felt by the tokenization of herself and being used as an image for the school to say, “look what we can do.”

“I think it was heightened once my self concept was like jarred a little by the, “you don't count,” comment. Then it felt like there was more to prove like more of the model like, “okay, you have to do this, you have to succeed at this because like, if people are gonna believe in your community, like they're going to have to believe in you kind of thing. And like, now you're a representative.” Um, “and even if the community doesn't see you as a representative, like you still have to put forth the effort of being like a Black person who is successful and a Black person who like took the, you know, was able to achieve and did, did you know, went to whatever name, brand college.” I just felt a little bit bothered by it as time went on, because I was like, they're gonna, they're expecting a particular sort of answer and if I can't deliver that, then they're disappointed, which then makes me disappointed in myself. But for me personally, it was less, less than the “be a Black success story and more of the be an “our district” success story, or like an our, our high school success story” since our image is bad.”

Other pressures that impacted self-esteem and identity identified by study participants came from parents who wanted their children’s lives to be better and easier. This observation was particularly noticeable among participants with immigrant parents who put immense pressure on their children to excel academically.

Another participant mentioned her realization of race outside of honors and how that impacted how she saw herself. She stated that this experience had a negative impact on her self-esteem, especially as a mixed race person. She additionally discussed how this realization moment caused her to question her position within the school, her identity, and feeling racially

validated. She expressed how her experiences regarding race have been particularly skewed due to the advanced track experiences she's had for the majority of her schooling. She felt it created a bubble between herself and other people in her racial community, leaving her feeling blindsided to some of the racial divisions occurring at her school.

"I didn't really think about any sort of racial divide outside of honors cause I was just like, "Oh, these people are my friends and we're just all like doing honors stuff together." One of my friends in the honors class who was also Black, looked at me and it was not intended to be malicious, but said to me when talking about how many Black students were in these classes, and was like, "Okay, yeah, you're in them, but you don't count." That one messed with my self-concept for a while going forward. I'd never thought about there being a distinction of being too white to mix with the Black kids. That was kind of mind blowing to me because I always knew that like historically, I'd had more white friends, but I didn't think it, that I had done it to a point that had excluded me from interacting with the Black community. So when that happened, I was like, "Oh my goodness, what have I been doing all this time?" And it was very jarring. That was a turning point in terms of realizing that outside of honors, there was a whole group of kids that shared my identity, but shared none of my experiences and had none of the privileges and like other things I didn't have to deal with by always having a place in honors. So, that was the moment when I realized that my self-concept of identifying as a Black person was very removed from the realities that other people experienced being Black."

Another participant expressed feelings of racial invalidation and isolation because they were not able to connect to other peers of color and described how these feelings affected their self-concept, schooling and self-esteem and feelings of isolation and loneliness. The socialization within the school system at this participant's school was so segregated that the desire to have communities of racial support among peers was nearly impossible to establish. The participant gave further examples below:

"The kids that were in the higher level classes, they also would have mostly white or Asian friends because like, they were like fitting in with the other kids that were in those advanced classes as well. And like, I remember I was in newspaper class with Sammy and Nadir. We were all like in the class and sometimes you could like commensurate. And like their friends were way in Asian and there was not really much of like camaraderie or like racial, like bonding with the kids in my classes. And I don't know, I didn't have that bond with people. And just

generally I felt isolated, like how I am and like other things about me and like loneliness. I would say that like, I didn't get any like racial validation, even from the kids who I shared the same race with in my classes.”

Another aspect of racial invalidation felt by a participant involved their identity, self-esteem and struggles to deal with the model minority myth among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. This invalidation manifested by them discounting their experiences and being unsure how to sort through all the nuances of race and racial interactions within a white supremacist society when minorities are pitted against one another. The participant best explained the complexities of their identity and experiences as follows:

“PI: Do you feel like you often discount your experiences? Maybe because you are still internalizing a lot of things like the model minority myths and things and like a lot of your life by trying to fit in as best with white people?”

Participant: I think being Asian is really tricky, especially being mixed because, like our white supremacist society is based on oppressing different races and minorities including Asians, but also like racism against different groups is like, so vastly different that I personally have a hard time. I'm still trying to work out how to feel about dealing with anti-Asian racism with COVID. And at the same time, making sure that I prioritize like anti-Black racism and anti indigenous racism, because those are the ones directly, like yes, Asians are being attacked sometimes right now. And yeah, it's terrible. But I have a hard time, like prioritizing that when, it is just so complicated. Especially because a lot of Asians have participated in anti-Black racism and are complicit in that and still hold a lot of like anti-Black and anti indigenous biases and so it's really complicated. I need to figure out a space where I'm not discounting my feelings and experiences of racism, but also holding a light to like other people's experiences as well, and not making it about me.”

In conclusion, dichotomous identities existed among students of color, particularly Black students because their experiences drastically varied between their academic and social experiences. Students struggled to find their identity and place because they felt culturally dissonant, isolated and alienated from other peers of color, especially peers of their own race. Participants described this phenomenon in various ways: some described it as a “fractured personality,” others discussed feeling like they couldn't find their footing, while others referred

to this as being “a different kind of black,” or “too white and not Black enough.” Coping with this dueling identity affected self-concept and self-esteem negatively, created additional stressors, pressures, and resulted in feelings that they could not be their true self all of the time. Some participants expressed feelings of tokenism in their advanced courses and the pressure to be examples of Black excellence; others felt like they could not find racial validation among other Black students. Other students, particular from Asian backgrounds, discussed focusing their identity and self-esteem on trying to fit in with white students, while other participants talked about how being articulate, approachable, and being able to code-switch allowed them to fit in better with their white peers and teachers.

Looking ahead to racialized experiences at Oberlin College, participants have expressed that finding those communities that did support them in their racial identity have been critical. Participants describe having these connections as important because experiences with race and schooling remain huge influences in their day-to-day life on campus. Oberlin College is a predominantly white institution that is not devoid of racism and the effects of systemic racism. Some of the places that Black interviewees have cited spaces of tremendous support on campus are being an active member and/or living in Afrikan Heritage House, participating in ABUSUA (Oberlin College’s Black Student Union) and African Students Association (ASA). These three groups are student organizations on campus. Other participants have decided to major in Africana Studies majors because those professors and communities have been extremely encouraging and uplifting. These positive experiences have inspired previously conflicted study participants (and Oberlin students) to further their influence in the Black community after they receive their undergraduate degree. The final findings chapter brings together sources of support

in accessing higher education, recognizing private school privileges that further disadvantage access to liberal arts institutions for students of color.

Chapter 7: Bringing it all Together: Schools as Potent Socializing Agents

This chapter primarily focuses on the various sources of support that are critical during K-12 students' schooling experiences in order for them to be successful and move onto higher education. Teachers, mentors, coaches, and guidance counselors in high school are crucial sources of support. Teachers tend to be more supportive if students are participating in gifted and talented programs or advanced courses, and more likely to push community colleges outside of these advanced course tracks. Additionally, teachers support or lack thereof can make or break college plans. Some students have expressed having financial access to higher education or sports being their pathway to higher education.

Secondly, this chapter focuses on how private high schools provide even more support or increased levels of support and privilege compared to public high schools. Some participants have recognized and acknowledged these privileges. By having more support and greater privilege, private schools have created and led to more opportunities to attend selective colleges. These private school privileges and different levels of access have led elite liberal arts institutions such as Oberlin College to primarily recruit from private high schools participating in social reproduction and gatekeeping. These practices have further disadvantaged students of color without access to private school, reiterating the profound gatekeeping effects tracking and school experiences have on students of color.

Finally, this chapter focuses on the experiences and costs for students of color in schooling. Participants have discussed feeling as if they had few teachers of color, or people that “looked like them.” Other participants have reflected on how their schooling and experiences surrounding race have continued to affect them throughout their collegiate experiences. One participant questions whether being in the advanced track and having to work extra hard all the

time is really worth it and if the costs and things given up during formative teenage years outweighs the benefits of access to higher education. These costs have related to feelings of isolation and self-esteem mentioned in the previous chapter; this practice further disadvantaged students of color who have attended public schools, or are from districts with lower funding.

Support

Participants discussed how support in schools is established in early school socialization. Additionally, participants stated that if those support systems were not in place, it would be more difficult later in schooling to identify if such support existed or to create support systems for themselves. Early interventions in elementary school could have perhaps mediated some of the later tracking effects seen in high school and have improved access to higher education.

Participants discussed some reasons that it is so challenging to get support in elementary schools. There is only one teacher and big classes without any extra assistance. One participant discussed the effects of support and tracking in elementary schools. She talked about elementary schools needing increased support and creative teaching strategies to reach and support the students not immediately getting the curriculum and content:

“I think in elementary school there could've been a lot more support, I think a lot of kids wouldn't have felt like they hadn't missed opportunities, but I think there were a lot of kids that sort of, because they couldn't "keep up" with like the median pace of whatever the teacher was doing, like fell into the remedial zone, even though they might really not have been there, but just needed things approached in different ways. I think elementary school was really when a lot of kids that were struggling or just treading water, just got decimated in terms of people actively looking out for them and trying to make sure that their needs were being taken care of and having resources available to them. I just think a lot of kids got put in remedial classes that could have benefited from not being in those, but because getting called out on behavioral things or got for whatever reason, just they just got swept up into those classes. And then believed that, that was where they had to stay for the rest of time. I think those kids would have benefited from a lot of the positive attention of, "you know, you have the skills, let's just go about it a different way." I think elementary school was really when that blow got dealt.”

She additionally went on to discuss concerns that such paths of students' secondary and post-secondary schooling is determined so early on in a child's life, however this reaction exemplifies the problems with tracking and gatekeeping and how these practices are separated well before middle school years.

While some interviewees mentioned potential earlier interventions in a child's schooling, other participants discussed certain support systems that were imperative to their self-esteem, their achievement and success in school. Several cited consistent support throughout childhood, including high school, was critical. Parents, teachers, mentors, coaches, counselors, and themselves were named as driving forces in students' successes and eventual access to higher education. These support systems acted as protective factors and barriers against exposing students to additional negativity in schools as a result of differential treatment in the form of microaggressions, implicit biases or other racial treatment. These protective factors and barriers mitigated some of the potential negative self-concept and self-esteem effects that could have arisen from dealing with such events throughout schooling.

Having specific teacher and mentor support allowed participants to feel valued and worthy in school, which allowed them to increase their ambitions related to schooling. However, participants acknowledged that they felt fortunate to have adequate support given that they knew of many students that didn't receive the same kind of support. Some participants speculated that perhaps, because of the lack of encouragement and/or support from teachers, these other students never questioned the track and path set forth for them. Additionally, it was suggested that students with less support internalized thinking that where they were placed in school was right on par with their abilities and intelligence (i.e., they thought that they were where they belonged). Because of this internalization of tracking, some participants hypothesized that their

peers were not pushed to their fullest potential, didn't believe in themselves, were "stuck," or thought it was easier to remain on the lower level track (as previously designated) than to try and change tracks. As previously discussed, on its own, switching tracks is difficult and nearly impossible.

Some interviewees described the permanent influences that experiences with teachers had on their college plans and course choices. One interviewee expressed having a very difficult time with her math teacher in high school that evoked feelings of fear and dread. She then recounted a situation here at Oberlin College in which she needed to take a statistics course as a major requirement here at Oberlin College; because of her negative math class experiences in high school, the idea of having to take a math class again was very scary and anxiety provoking even though the class wouldn't be until next semester. Another interviewee shared how she was pushed out of her computer science class because of the stigma that, "it's a white man's major," and the lack of support influenced her negative opinion of the subject continued today in her college life. While other interviewees did not name specific courses and/or subjects that affected them negatively, they described feeling dumber than they actually were because other peers, particularly white peers, had increased support networks. Other interviewees mentioned having sports as a vehicle to a liberal arts education.

While some negative effects were mentioned, other interviewees described how teachers had influenced their schooling so much that it dictated career paths. A participant went into detail below about how teachers impacted him:

"PI: How does your schooling experiences involving race still affect your life to this day?"

Interviewee: Well it's dictated a prospective career, so I would say it's in my life. I think about it pretty frequently actually and is part of the reason I want to become a teacher. I have seen what good teachers have done for me. If I hadn't run into some of the teachers that I had run into, it's really not super far-fetched to think

that I would never have come to Oberlin. Good teachers have shaped my life so fundamentally, um, and a lot of that has been identity based, I would say. I want to be able to provide that for other students. I'd say that my schooling has affected my life that way.

This interviewee expressed the significant and positive influence that teachers had on him and how he might not have had the access to Oberlin College that he did; he contributes this outcome to his teacher support. This concept ties back to students needing to feel important, confident, and valued in school and how the school system has such critical influences on such self-concepts.

Another interviewer briefly discussed how her experiences with teachers and those support systems dictated her career paths. She discussed getting into a graduate program for educational policy because, in her schooling experiences, she noticed how profound the effects of larger school networks could have on students experiences, both positively and negatively. She talked more about how being valued in the Africana Studies major at Oberlin College with the people and professors in that department serving as her key supporters.

Additionally, all my interviewees expressed having access to the advanced and gifted tracks. Although, they noted that their schools, teachers, and counselors were more supportive and encouraging of future education paths in those classes; outside of those classes, the schools pushed students towards state schools, community colleges and partnerships that the districts had with those institutions. I am not saying that these partnerships should not exist - because for many students they are the only pathways to higher education. I am advocating that more students should be steered down paths that allow them to achieve their fullest potential; I find it concerning that some students appear to be stuck on the lower or regular tracks throughout their entire schooling experiences.

Private School Privileges

Private high schools provided more support and privilege as compared to public schools. This additional level of support led to additional opportunities and pathways into selective colleges, especially at institutions like Oberlin College. Many interviewees recognized these private school privileges when thinking about peers in other school districts, or in different types of schools with differing experiences. One example of additional support was described as individualized attention from supportive teachers, greater college and career counseling, which may have included learning about Oberlin College. Interviewees indicated that oftentimes their exposure to information about selective higher institutions of education was through their private school; many felt that if they had not gone to that private school, like their peers, they would not have even thought about attending a school like Oberlin College. Not surprisingly, this information gap led to significant discrepancies between experiences at public high schools and private schools.

Another important point discussed by interviewees was related to their knowledge about applying to in-state and out-of-state colleges as compared to their peers. My interviewees shared that some of their peers could not comprehend the idea that an out-of-state college, like Oberlin College, could be less expensive than an in-state school, especially those that had partnerships with the school district and supportive funding and/or grants. This lack of knowledge and awareness regarding financial aid systems in place at private higher education institutions increases barriers to accessing these schools for students who are more fiscally conscious and or challenged because of their lower income backgrounds. Additionally, it is highly likely that these financial aid packages from such institutions of higher education are not advertised widely to students unless they are personally sought after. It is more advantageous to the institution to have

students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. An interviewee discussed this phenomenon below:

“I think I'm telling you something that you absolutely know, but then, even the public schools in Pittsburgh just like did not have the same resources where counselors were not going to the public schools in Pittsburgh's, uh, offices and dropping off, you know, college counselors and dropping off information and we're not meeting with students. And that might have changed. That might not be completely true, but it was just not the thing. So even the potential, the thought, the possibility, the knowledge of the schools and you know, that they need a hundred percent of demonstrated financial aid or financial need. They need, they, they, you know, have this, they have that people don't know that they literally don't know that. It's also just not setting them up for what liberal arts and these elite institutions are looking for. And so, I think sometimes it just can be like a lose, lose.”

College recruiters for selective, private institutions are not advertising and getting the word out about their institutions at public high schools at the same rate as at prestigious, small, expensive private high schools. These institutions are not sending admissions counselors/recruiters, are not meeting with students, and are not even sending flyers to many public high schools for potential students. Thus, many high school students' literal lack of knowledge about the existence of Oberlin College is a barrier to higher education. Additionally, this knowledge gap brings me to relate the above interviewee quote to *The Privileged Poor* (Jack, 2019). Oberlin College is an elite, expensive, liberal arts college to which many students of color do not have access. In many ways, students have no chance of attending colleges similar to Oberlin College due to the current state of educational procedures (e.g., practices of tracking) starting in late elementary school.

Most of these institutions of higher education are already demographically skewed toward people of higher socioeconomic status. However, it is essential to look at other populations attending these institutions. Jack (2019) describes two kinds of students who struggle when getting to college: the privileged poor and the doubly disadvantaged. The privileged poor are low-income students who could attend prep and boarding schools due to

receiving financial aid or needing to meet diversity quotas. On the other hand, the doubly disadvantaged are low-income students who attended public school and still attended college. Jack (2019) explains that colleges receiving more students who would fit in the privileged poor category rather than the doubly disadvantaged is known as hedging bets. By admitting a privileged poor student, they ensure that the admitted student will do "well" at that particular kind of school. If a student has the ability to attend a preparatory or boarding high school, students have access on how to succeed in institutions of higher education. Some skills taught in these preparatory or boardings schools are how to succeed in college courses from discourse, paper writing skills, asking for help, etc. Jack (2019) explains that the privileged poor "understand and behave in similar ways as their wealthy peers, which facilitates university success." Another point on hedging bets includes that schools end up recruiting half of their low-income students from the same schools as their high-income peers even though that group makes up a small percentage of the low-income community (Jack, 2019).

Experiences and Costs of Schooling for Students of Color

A significant number of participants discussed having few teachers that looked like them throughout their experiences in high school. Many expressed wishing that they had more teachers that looked like them or appreciating having professors of color in their respective majors. They felt like having teachers of color were essential to having more positive schooling experiences and supports. A majority of interviewees' teachers were white and didn't usually understand their experiences or participated in every day implicit biases that permeated throughout the school system. One participant discussed how having a teacher of color affected her schooling experiences. She said:

“My class year had the most Black people in it. My AP US History teacher, she loved all of us. She was differentially nice to all of us. At that point in our school,

there weren't other professors, like teachers were like being specifically nice to us. It was really nice to have a teacher who was specifically very nice to us. It was really nice to have her there. She would teach history, she was very pro Black, and she was actually very pro teaching real history and not white-washing history. She knew I was probably the most radical in class and she would back me up. She'd be like, "Yep. She's absolutely correct." No one else was saying that like, yes, like uprisings and rebellions needed to happen because they weren't getting, um, any points across anyway. So it was nice to have, like, that was really, she was my safe space and high school if I ever needed to have a safe space. So it was very, very good to have."

Participants reflect on how experiences of race and schooling continue to affect their lives to this day. Some of these experiences of race and schooling reflect their schooling experiences pre-college. One interviewee talked about the racial makeup of Oberlin College as being much improved over the racial makeup of his high school. However, when he thought about his major and taking classes within the Conservatory, he drew parallels to some aspects of school and race have not changed for him:

"I guess in the college it's better, as for being the only student of color. But as for my major and really any given con class, I'll be the only Black student, really the only student of color really at all, that, that part hasn't changed. I do wonder what my life would be like if I had been around more like high achieving Black scholars."

This participant additionally discussed how he wished that he was exposed to more examples of black excellence. Throughout his high school experiences and current college experiences, his exposure to Black scholars has been minimal.

While some participants noticed similarities in their experiences before college, another participant described how being in college changed their racial identity. Another participant reflected on the handling of shifting demographics between their high school schooling experiences to those at Oberlin College. They explained that, because of their upbringing and geographic location prior to coming to Oberlin College, they didn't see themselves as a person of

color; however, they stated that being at a predominantly white institution changed their view on themselves.

“I feel like it's hard because being an Oberlin was the first time when I wasn't surrounded by mostly Asian people. I definitely started identifying as a person of color in college. That being said, I feel like I don't really experience very many microaggressions or like negative experiences directly related to race, but I do feel like the model minority myth of being Asian and like good academics is still something that I encounter, but like not explicitly more like implicitly. I do remember specifically being like, "Oh my God, I'm like the only Asian student in this class". Like I'm surrounded by white students and I'm like the one person of color and I'm like Asian, I'm not like Black or indigenous. They're like a lot of international students that are from, um, different parts of Asia. And I really feel like I have a very, very different experience than they do obviously. And I also don't really feel like I can identify much with their experiences because we had such a huge, different, like, different experience. Um, it's really interesting.”

While this participant did not see themselves as a person of color until coming to Oberlin College, they were much conflicted in their racial identity, specifically dealing with the model minority myth, and relating to other students of color. The quote above highlighted how various contexts and situations shape our self-concepts and identity regarding academics, and primary and secondary school are certainly not the only contexts that affect these self-identity formations.

Another participant observed how experiences regarding race for him have been positive at Oberlin, especially as it related to the dueling identity he felt in high school:

“The negative way I would say that I was affected in school was that I lived in that sort of fractured code switching all the time type of place for so incredibly long that like this is my first time being myself. Coming to Oberlin was my first time being myself. You're always going to be learning and growing and discovering, I understand that, but I feel like I lost a lot of time.”

While experiences at Oberlin for this interviewee have been pleasant surrounding his racial identity and self-concept and this is important to recognize, he still feels conflicted about how much time he lost trying to be two different people at the same time.

Thinking back on her experiences in school, one of my interviewees questioned if people from particularly marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds were having to work harder to have that access to higher education, and at what point does that work become too much and no longer worth it? She explained her thoughts further:

“Of the people that I know that did actively want to go to college and went into college, I think some of them, especially, but like super low-income people had to work triple or quadruple as hard. They had to be the valedictorian. They had to have the perfect GPA, and they took every class that would boost their GPA, the moment it came out, regardless of whether they were good in that subject or not, and studied their asses off because of it. I think a lot of them didn't get to fully enjoy being in high school or just like being a teenager because they were so caught up in being able to go to college and stuff like that. There were a couple of kids in my year that actually went to Stanford. Um, but when I think back on things like what I remember of them in high school, it's just always, always, always, always working like, and I think like how much do you have to sacrifice for it to be worth it? You know? And I don't blame them. I just, it makes me sad.”

We spend the majority of our childhood and formative years in schooling. When there are added barriers in order for students to be successful in school, the barriers cause schooling to be much more difficult. These difficulties are especially challenging for students of color who lack adequate support, whether that be related to financial issues, or teachers and administration. These students are left finding their own way through these difficulties, and paving their own pathways when finding those access points to higher education.

In conclusion, various sources of support are critical during K-12 students' schooling experiences. Teachers are a crucial source of support. Private high schools provide increased levels of support and additional privilege compared to public high schools, which creates greater opportunities for students attending these types of high schools to attend selective colleges. These privileges allow elite liberal arts institutions like Oberlin College to primarily recruit from private high schools that are participating in social reproduction and gatekeeping. These

practices have further disadvantaged students of color who do not have access to private schools, reiterating the profound gatekeeping effects that tracking and school experiences have on students of color. Finally, participants, who have reflected on how their schooling and experiences surrounding race have continued to affect them throughout their collegiate experiences, raised two questions - is being on the advanced track and having to work extra hard all the time worth it? and do the costs of giving up certain activities or making certain choices during formative teenage years outweigh the benefits of access to higher education?

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This paper contributes to existing research on race, educational experiences, tracking in advanced courses, how tracking affects access to higher education, and issues arising among self-concept, racial identity, and self-esteem. Through fifteen in-depth interviews with Oberlin College students of color, I investigated these topics. Below I highlight the main findings presented in the four findings chapters, Chapters 4 through Chapter 7 .

Major Findings

High schools are incredibly potent socializing forces. Experiences throughout high school shape students' academic identities and affect self-esteem positively and negatively. These experiences are fully engulfed by the myriad of structural inequalities of gifted and advanced courses offered, tracking, type of high school and associated funding, and special education all of which are bound by racism and white supremacy culture.

In Chapter 4, I introduce the ways that tracking has profound influences on school experiences and further highlight these influences through my interviewees. During late elementary school/early middle school, students begin to be assessed, grouped by presumed abilities, and set up on specific educational tracks, often racially segregated. Participants describe a train analogy, in which the advanced track train leaves the station in early middle school. Once departed, there are minimal opportunities for students to change tracks, which creates barriers to advanced high school classes, further disadvantaging students of color regarding access to higher education. Some interventions to increase diversity numbers in schools have been initiated, but continue to fall short of improving access likely because tracks for students of color were set up years prior.

In Chapter 5, I expand on the ways tracking experiences in advanced courses influence racial identity, experiences of racism, and within school segregation. Low numbers of students of color in advanced classes contributes to feelings of tokenism from teachers and administration. In addition to within school segregation, differences arise among how teachers are teaching and feeling about their courses and how those behaviors and feelings are implicitly tied to race and influences treatment of students.

In Chapter 6, I highlight the emergence of dichotomous identities that are expressed among students of color, particularly Black students, given their drastically varied academic and social experiences. Participants describe this phenomenon in various ways: some describe it as a “fractured personality,” others discuss feeling like they couldn’t find their footing, while others refer to this feeling as being “a different kind of black,” or “too white and not Black enough.” Coping with this dueling identity affects self-concept and self-esteem negatively, creates additional stressors, pressures, and results in feelings that they could not be their true self all of the time. Some participants express feelings of tokenism; others felt like they could not find racial validation among other Black students. Other students, particularly those from Asian backgrounds, discuss focusing their identity and self-esteem on trying to fit in with white students, while other participants talk about how being articulate, approachable, and being able to code-switch allowed them to fit in better with their white peers and teachers.

In Chapter 7, I reemphasize how high schools are incredibly potent socializing forces. I primarily focus on the various sources of support that are critical during K-12 students' schooling experiences in order for them to be successful and move onto higher education. Teachers, mentors, coaches, and guidance counselors are crucial sources of support. Teachers tend to be more supportive if students are participating in gifted and talented programs or

advanced courses, and more likely to push community colleges outside of these advanced course tracks. This chapter also focuses on how private high schools provide increased levels of support and greater privilege compared to public high schools. By having more support and greater privilege, private schools have created more opportunities for their students to attend selective colleges. These private school privileges and different levels of access have led elite liberal arts institutions, such as Oberlin College, to primarily recruit from private high schools participating in social reproduction and gatekeeping. These practices have further disadvantaged students of color without access to private school, reiterating the profound gatekeeping effects tracking and school experiences have on students of color. Finally, participants, who have reflected on how their schooling and experiences surrounding race have continued to affect them throughout their collegiate experiences, raised two questions - is being on the advanced track and having to work extra hard all the time worth it? and do the costs of giving up certain activities or making certain choices during formative teenage years outweigh the benefits of access to higher education?

Scope/Limitations

Some limitations of this project were that, due to IRB restrictions, limited amount of time to complete the project, and COVID-19 pandemic changes, I was only able to collect data with current Oberlin College students. The ideal population for this research (in order to look at possible earlier interventions and influencing tracking) would be for participants to be high school age and younger. These high school students are actively experiencing the situations that the Oberlin College students were remembering. I may have also been able to interview students who have been placed in remedial, and regular courses, or even in advanced courses but with vastly different life circumstances and experiences. Additionally, Oberlin College students of color are still privileged in many ways that other students of color across the nation do not

experience or have access to such experiences. Further, because Oberlin College is an elite, private, liberal arts institution, the limitations of this project is its lack of including experiences of students at larger, public, perhaps less selective colleges and universities. Although it's not a limitation, but instead it was beyond the scope of this project and associated timeframe for completion, the ability to collect data with "middle of the road" college students, meaning students who were not on the advanced track, students in middle income families, students with average GPAs, and other median examples of student life, may have provided additional insights into my project's findings.

Future Solutions and Implications

Mun, Ezzani, and Lee (2020) propose several solutions for being a culturally relevant leader in gifted education. The literature suggests that district and school leaders should exercise culturally relevant leadership in gifted education in ways that consider organizational policies and practices and educators' individual beliefs and behaviors, which impact students' identification and inclusion from historically minoritized populations. This literature implores leaders to transcend the barriers of the personal (via introspection of one's assumptions about others), the professional (by exercising the will and skill to act ethically), and also to recognize that public education's political context poses impediments rooted in schooling structures of persistent implicit and explicit racism (Mun et al., 2020). The call for educational leaders to act in complex and multilayered ways aligns with Horsford et al. 's (2011) appeal to advance cultural relevance and antiracism pedagogies to identify and serve students of color. Systemic culturally relevant and responsive leadership would clear the way to aid students in gifted programs from various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, but only if educators honor and value diversity and accept unique archetypes of giftedness and the many ways in which they can be

identified (Horsford et al., 2011; Mun et al., 2020). For this purpose, educational leaders and teachers need high-quality professional development and training in culturally relevant leadership and pedagogy, respectively, that is ongoing, in strengths-based approaches, and gifted identification and services for diverse student populations (Mun et al., 2020).

Educators select and use equitable approaches and assessments that minimize bias for referring and identifying students with gifts and talents, attending to the frequently hidden or under-identified (Mun et al., 2020). Approaches and tools may include front-loading talent development activities, universal screening, using locally developed norms, assuring assessment tools are in the child's preferred language for communication or nonverbal formats, and building relationships with students to understand their unique challenges and needs (NAGC, 2019). Leaders who can promote anti-racist pedagogy set the tone to elucidate and oppose the persistence of racism in the institution of schooling, the curriculum, and its bearing on students. However, it is difficult to discuss and implement (Mun et al., 2020). This approach could manifest through teacher-led classroom inquiry and discussions, which counter racism and help students conceptualize integrated systems of oppression. Finally, school leaders can intentionally outreach and provide gifted training for parents on advocating for gifted enrollment.

Using equity pedagogy as a teacher is an essential instructional process that can better teach and learn. Equity pedagogy challenges teachers to use teaching strategies that facilitate the learning process by providing a basis for addressing critical aspects of schooling and transforming curricula and schools (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). Additionally, using equity pedagogy can empower school culture, social structure, and content integration (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995).

Teaching is inherently a multicultural encounter. Students and teachers alike belong to diverse groups, whether age, race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. Being skilled in equity pedagogy allows for diversity to enrich instruction instead of fearing or ignoring it. Self-understanding and knowledge of the histories, modal characteristics, and intragroup differences of ethnic groups are essential competencies required for teachers to implement equity pedagogy (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). They provide a foundation for teachers to identify, create, and implement teaching strategies that enhance all students' academic achievement. Equity pedagogy is a process that locates the student at the center of schooling.

Other potential solutions that may offset problems with tracking include having state policies require schools and districts to identify and describe tracks and to communicate these placement policies to state departments of education and to the communities they serve (Mathis, 2013). States and nonprofit organizations should connect educators with research to advance best practices in serving heterogeneous populations and provide sustained professional development so teachers can successfully instruct these heterogeneous populations (Mathis, 2013). Districts and schools should phase out curricular stratifications starting at the lowest track while additionally communicating to the public the rationale for doing so because many white parents may push back on this idea (Mathis, 2013). Districts and schools should also allow open enrollment in advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate (IB) courses (Mathis, 2013). Lastly, districts and schools must listen to all parents, regardless of whether they tend to speak out more ensuring that the parents that are more quiet are heard (Mathis, 2013).

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Appendix

Item 1: Interview Questions

Warm-Up/Background Information

1. How do you identify, ethnically and/or racially?
2. Tell me about your high school and its area
 - a. Where did you grow up?
 - i. Was it an urban, suburban, or rural area?
 - ii. Consisted mostly of upper, middle, working classes?
3. Was the area you grew up in diverse?
 - a. Was your school diverse?
4. Was your friend group predominantly peers of your own race? Or with other races?
5. Did the activities you participated in outside of school (sports, clubs, etc.) consist of peers predominantly of your own race? Or with other races?
6. How would you generally describe your overall self-esteem and wellbeing growing up?
 - a. Specifically during your teens?

Instances of Racism from Teachers

1. Do you recall ever being treated differently in high school due to your race or ethnicity?
 - a. If nothing happened to you personally, did you ever hear of such treatment at your school?
 - b. When did this event occur?
 - c. Was it a single occurrence or happened over a period of time?
 - d. Would you describe this event as overtly racist or more subtle?
 - i. Did others witness the event?
 - ii. How did others react to this event?
 - iii. Did this event(s) affect more than just you (other students of color)?
 - e. What happened afterwards?
 - i. (Examples: Nothing? Skipping class more often? Dirty looks? Academic consequences? Teacher consequences? Attention through social media?)

- f. Was this event part of a pattern?"
- g. Did they occur often? Were the events similar in manifestation (always stereotypes, always comments about specific topics) in similar or different ways?
 - i. Did some of these instances occur more in certain classes over others?
 - 1. Can you explain the types of classes further?
(examples: STEM, humanities, athletics)
- h. Did these microaggressions/stereotyping occur frequently?
- i. When did they occur? Were other events also happening?
 - i. (examples of such events - managing behavior in and out of the class, teaching advanced concepts, getting parents involved)

Specific School Course Experiences

1. *Were you a BIPOC that had the option to take advanced/AP courses? Did you choose to take these classes?*
 - a. If yes, what was your reasoning?
 - b. If no, what was your reasoning?
 - c. How many other students of color were in those classes?
 - d. Did you particularly feel like these classes were taught differently than regular classes?
 - i. In what ways?
 - e. Did these classes feel more alienating/isolating than other classes or the opposite such as feelings of accomplishment, inclusion, worth?
 - i. In what ways?
 - f. Did you feel like you had to work harder in these classes compared to your peers?
 - i. In what ways?
 - g. How did participating/lack of participation in these courses influence your self-esteem?
 - i. Did you find places where teachers supported you and valued you as a student?
 - ii. Or were they a source of discouragement and frustration?

2. *Were you placed in remedial courses in high school?*
 - a. What was the experience in these courses like?
 - b. Were there predominantly students of color or white students in your classes?
 - c. How did teachers treat you in these courses?
 - i. Did you feel smart? Worthy?
 - d. Did taking remedial courses negatively influence your school experiences? In what ways and why?

Effects of School Experiences Long-Term

1. Broadly, how did these experiences of differential treatment from teachers affect your self-esteem, if at all?
 - a. Were you treated as a good student/bad student because of it?
 - b. Did you face many disciplinary actions?
 - c. What kind of attention did your teachers pay to you?
 - i. Was this attention positive?
 - ii. Or was this attention negative?
 - d. Did you feel worthy in school?
 - i. Like you were smart? Could accomplish anything you wanted to?
 - e. Were there ways that this event(s) of race-based treatment permanently affected the way that you interacted with school?

(Examples: doing homework, skipping class, caring about school, grades, extracurriculars, college choices, testing)
2. Thinking about the questions I just posed to you to reflect on your own experiences with race and schooling, tell me about some experiences in school that involved racism, implicit biases, different treatment for your peers, etc.
 - a. In what ways did peers also treat you differently due to your race?
 - b. In general, how do you feel your white classmates were treated in school/experienced school?

How Do We End Up Where We Do

Obviously, you ended up at an elite liberal arts institution (Oberlin College) where many other students of color have not had the same opportunities, support, pathways to higher education as you. Your experiences may vary from many other students of color across the nation, comparatively.

1. Can you describe specific ways in which you received support that allowed you to end up where you are today and have the access to higher education?
 - a. How did this support influence your self-esteem academically and educational decisions?
 - b. In what ways, did all the cards line up for you and not others? How did they manifest and why?
2. What were the sources of this support? From teachers? Parents? Coaches?
3. How did this support system start? Or when did you notice?
(a teacher took interest in you, a parent vouched for you, a mentor encouraged you, you were raised with high-expectation/pressure from your parents,

Now think about your peers from (your neighborhood, high school, childhood friends, etc.) that didn't have the same access to higher education (either had to take different pathways to be able to attend college, or weren't able to attend college altogether).

1. In what ways did their access to attend college differ from your experiences?
 - a. Did these differing experiences occur throughout their life (from childhood to 18) or were they more specific to their teen years?
 - b. Were any of these access issues preventable or inevitable results of a problematic system?
 - c. Was their lack of resources and support due to specific factors or a combination of a lot of things?
 - i. (Examples: Class? SES? Home life/Parental support? Treatment at school? Disciplinary actions? Medical/Disability?)

Wrap Up

1. How does your schooling experiences involving race still affect your life to this day?
 - a. What would you have liked to be different?

Item 2: Demographic Participant Data Figure

Pseudonym	Race	Ethnicity	Type of High School	School Diversity	Graduating Class Size	Neighborhood Type	City of School
Ann	biracial	Afro-Caribbean & French	Private	"diverse for a private school"	<60	suburban	Pittsburgh, PA
Carter	black	Jamaican	Public	majority POC/black	>300	suburban	Outside Atlanta
Dani	biracial	not stated	Public	"more students of color than any other school in the district"	~328	suburban	Kansas City, Missouri
Evon	black	not stated	Public Charter School	diverse but devoid of POC in upper level classes	~500	suburban	North of Atlanta
Fred	Asian American	Indian	Public - Selective Enrollment	"diverse but not integrated, like Chicago as a segregated city"	~400	urban/suburban	Chicago, IL
Georgia	black	not stated	Private	"PWI claiming diversity numbers"	<100	suburban	Cincinnati, OH
Helena	biracial	(white, Indian)	Public	equal parts white and Hispanic	~680	suburban	Outside Chicago
Isabella	black	not stated	Private	"a very white town with imported diversity"	~125	suburban	Newtown, PA
Jackie	black	not stated	Private	PWI, not diverse	~70	suburban	Outside Philadelphia
Krystal	biracial	(black, white)	Public	majority POC	~400	suburban	Southern California
Lennox	biracial (Asian)	Chinese, white	Public	majority POC	~600	urban/suburban	Sacramento, CA
Marisa	Latinx/white	Mexican/Hispanic	Public	majority POC/latinx	~500	suburban	San Ysidro / Chula vista, CA
Sasha	black	Ghanaian	Public	PWI, not diverse	>400	suburban	Outside Columbus, OH
Timothy	black	not stated	Public Charter School	diverse for small school	~80	SE DC, urban	Washington, DC
Veronica	biracial (Asian)	half Mexican/half Filipino	Public	majority POC	>400	suburban	Pasadena / Los Angeles Area