

THE INFLUENCE OF RACIALIZED ABILITY GROUPING ON
SCHOOL CLIMATE, ACADEMICE SELF-CONCEPT, AND
MOTIVATION

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The influence of racialized ability grouping on school climate, academic self-concept, and motivation

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Recent research highlights the academic gaps between Black students and White students. Much of the current research focuses on the gap between poor urban schools and more affluent suburban schools. The aim of the present research was to investigate the differential outcomes of Black and White students at a diverse middle class suburban high school. This research sought to understand why students with access to the same resources have differential outcomes. More precisely, this research examined the relationships of school climate, academic self-concept, and motivation. This study investigated how the leveling practices were racialized and how this related to classroom climate, academic self-concept, and motivation. To answer these questions ninth grade students were observed, surveyed and interviewed.

Results provided evidence that racialized ability grouping has negative effects on Black students' academic self-concept and increases performance avoidance motivation. Black students viewed the racial climate of their high school more negatively than white students. However, there were no differences between Black and White students' performance approach motivations. There were differences for classroom climate. Many low level classrooms were poorly-managed and this resulted in a negative classroom

climate and low student motivation. When a teacher managed the classroom well, there were no differences in student behavior or motivation regardless of level.

This case study found that Black students experienced differential treatment at school. This differential treatment resulted in a racial achievement gap. The discrimination faced by Black students at PHS was systemic and institutional. School policies such as leveling were racialized and Black students faced several barriers when trying to gain access to the upper level. A major barrier was the negative perception of black students as academically and behaviorally inferior to White students. White students were overwhelmingly viewed as better students than Black students. Although Black parents in the district were well educated and had high income levels the Black students, especially lower level students, were viewed as coming from low income or single parent households. These finding add to the discourse on racial stereotypes of Black students and how these stereotypes perpetuate the racial achievement gap.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family: Marvin, Joyce, Ashley and Joycelin.

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** Includes all preliminary and concluding sections

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Topic: The interaction of school climate, academic self-concept and motivation of Black students at middle class high school

Chapter 1: Introduction

The academic gap between middle class Black students and their counterparts is often found to be more significant than the gap between poor Blacks and Whites (Allen, 2010). Research has shown that Black and White students attending the same school with access to the same resources have differential academic outcomes (Davis and Welcher, 2013; Diamond, 2006; Ferguson, 2008; Ogbu 2003). John Ogbu's classic study (2003) of an affluent suburb, Shaker Heights, found that the Black students in the district had lower grade point averages, lower test scores and took less advanced placement courses than the White students in the same district. Debate continues on why Black students who attend racially mixed, middle class schools are underperforming.

Educational research has developed several theories to help explain the observed difference in Black and White students' academic achievement. Prevalent among these explanations are school climate and individual psychological characteristics. School climate is the learning atmosphere or environment (McMahan, 2009). A positive school environment has strong leadership; concise and fair rules, clear curricular goals, positive expectations for all students; and positive and respectful student-teacher interactions (Rutter & Maughan, 2002; Vieno, Perkins, Smith, & Santinello, 2005).

School climate also influences student's school experiences. Perceptions of school experiences are often based on relationships with teachers. Teachers' differential treatment and expectations have been shown to affect Black student achievement

(Chavaus, 2005; Ferguson, 2008; Roscigno, 1998). Perceived discrimination and prejudice at school has also been linked to academic underperformance of Black students (Eccles, Wong, & Peck, 2006; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Neblett, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003).

School tracking or leveling is another component of school climate (McElvoy & Welker, 2000). When students are tracked, they are grouped according to perceived ability. Several studies have found that schools with high levels of ability grouping have more negative school climate and negative academic outcomes, specifically for students placed in the lower tracks (DeSena & Ansalone, 2009; Ireson, & Hallam, 2009; Oakes, 1985).

Other studies of academic performance have focused on individual characteristics such as academic self-concept and motivation. Academic self-concept is how a student perceives his or her academic ability (Cokley, 2002; Ireson & Hallam, 2009). Several studies have found that academic self-concept is related to overall grade point average (Cokley, 2000a; Cokley, 2003; Witherspoon, Speight and Thomas, 1997). If a student has low academic self-concept they are at risk for becoming disidentified or disengaged from school (Griffin, 2002; Steele, 1992; Steele, 1997). When students are disengaged, they can become less motivated to do well in school and they are more likely to discount or devalue academic experiences (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998; Osborne, 1997; Steel & Aronson, 1995; Steele, Spencer and Aronson, 2002).

A body of psychological studies of achievement has focused on motivation and one's desire for academic success (Ames, 1992; Covington, 2000; Pintrich, 1999;

Zimmerman, 1990). Research on motivation and academic outcomes have found that students engage in either mastery goal orientation or performance goal orientation (Ames, 1992; Miller, Greene, Montalvo, Ravindran, & Nichols, 1996; Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 1998). Students who engage in mastery goal orientation are more likely to exert greater effort to learn and understand academic material (Dweck & Legget, 1998; Meece & Holt, 1993; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Midgley, Kaplan, & Middleton, 2001). The literature on academic motivation asserts that goal orientation influences a student's effort, persistence and study habits and strategies (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Legget, 1988; Meece & Holt, 1993; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Pintrich, 1999; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Zimmerman, 1990).

These sociological and psychological studies have contributed to a better understanding of academic achievement. Studies on school climate and school experiences have provided helpful information as to how social issues and structures within a school such as teacher-student interactions, tracking and perceived discrimination can positively or negatively influence motivation and academic performance. Psychological studies have also contributed to the academic achievement literature. Theories of academic self-concept and motivation provide insight on how individuals determine their own academic outcomes.

Research has shown that school climate is linked to student engagement and academic achievement (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009), and within schools with a diverse populations Black students may perceive the school climate differently than their counterparts (Koth, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2008; Marsh & Cornell, 2001). In addition, schools with diverse populations have more racialized tracking than schools

with homogenous populations (Oakes, 1985), and this has been linked to negative school climate (McElvoy & Welker, 2000) and a decrease in motivation and academic self-concept (Lucas, 1999).

As important as these studies are for understanding what contributes to academic achievement, there are few studies that examine how school climate, academic self-concept and motivational goals differ among different groups of students. Most research on academic achievement, especially psychological studies, examine students as a whole without disaggregating racial and social factors. Furthermore, there are not many studies that examine the interactions among school climate, academic self-concept, and motivational goals.

Significance of Study

This study is significant because it examined differential outcomes for Black and White students at a suburban, middle-class high school where students presumably have the same access to educational resources. It examined how sociological structures of a school and psychological characteristics of students interact within the school environment to better understand the differential academic outcomes between middle-class Black students and middle-class White students. Lucas (1999) urged future research on achievement and ability grouping to “investigate more thoroughly the nexus between social-psychological and structural track location. This study looks at the structure of leveling at PHS High school, but also the social-psychological aspects that influence leveling practices.

Several studies have looked at school climate and motivation (Anderman & Maehr, 1994); academic self-concept and motivation (Guay, Marsh, Boivin, 2003); racial

climate and academic self-concept (Hurtado, 1994); racial climate and motivation (Byrd & Chavous, 2011) but none have examined the relationships among all three concepts. Furthermore, these studies are overwhelmingly quantitative and few studies have examined academic self-concept and motivation in high schools students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose this mixed methods study was to understand the differential academic outcomes of Black and White students at PHS High School. To understand differential academic outcomes among the Black and White students, I examined the interaction between sociological and psychological factors such as school climate, academic self-concept, and academic motivation.

PHS is considered a high achieving school with a diverse student population. It received a Blue Ribbon award for the 1992-93 academic school year. The district superintendent, made it very clear he wanted to create a “college going culture” for all students who attend the district schools. The superintendent stated that his vision is for PHS “to be the top performing diverse suburban school district in the nation.” The mission is to “prepare each and every student, regardless of demographic or socioeconomic background, for postsecondary educational success.”

However, there is a significant gap in the academic outcomes between Black and White students. There are differences in the types of courses taken by Black and White students at PHS. More White students are enrolled in upper level and advanced courses, while more Black students are enrolled in lower level and remedial courses. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in college degree attainment for Black and White students. A report issued by the superintendent revealed that students in the upper level

courses had higher graduation rates than students in the lower level courses. The superintendent, Dr. Moore, proposed to restructure the school by consolidating many of the levels. The restructuring would allow more students to gain access to upper level classes and curriculum.

Research Questions

In November of 2009, a task force on Equity and Excellence was formed in the PHS school district. Its goal was to better understanding how academic placement is related to academic success and how to support all students on a pathway to academic excellence, specifically success in college. The task force created working subcommittees: one for elementary schools, one for middle schools, and one for the high school.

The task force created a report that focused on addressing how “classes in the school day are organized and structured, how students are assigned to classes, and how student learning is assessed.” The Equity and Excellence (2009) report states that “in the coming years as the work begins to reshape our system, the community can expect to see an increase in students of different backgrounds learning rigorous content together, with high expectations and supports for all students.”

As such this research aims to investigate the following questions:

Qualitative Research Questions:

1. What is the school climate and culture?
2. How is race related to the school ability grouping practices?
3. How is student “level” related to academic self-concept and motivation?
 - a. How do classroom practices and strategies influence academic self-concept and motivation?

- b. What are academic self-concept, motivation and behavioral differences between upper level students and lower level students?
- c. What are academic self-concept and motivation differences between Black students and White students?

Quantitative Research Questions:

1. How do students' score on the survey measures of academic self-concept, climate and motivation?
2. What are the relationships among the measures?
3. How is race, gender and level related to each measure?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

School Factors

School Climate

Adolescents spend a great deal of time at school, and there is no denying that what occurs there has considerable influence on their academic and social development. Educational and psychological research has highlighted the influence of the school environment on the individual (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Eccles & Roeser, 2009). Schools transmit very important messages about intelligence, morality, and even one's individual worth. These messages are given directly and indirectly. They are intentional as well as unintentional; however, regardless of intentionality, the affect can be detrimental to a student's academic trajectory. As Tyson (2011) posits, the schooling experiences of students influences how they think about their academic chances. Schooling experiences affect "a student's ideas about their own abilities, achievement, race and getting ahead," (Tyson, p. 547).

School climate research focuses on schooling experiences and how the school environment influences academic performance. School climate research can be categorized by three distinct approaches (Stockard & Mayberry, 1992): 1) *effective schools research*, which attempts to identify school attributes that distinguish effective schools from ineffective schools; 2) *organizational climate research*, which assesses school climate through surveying school staff on perceptions of school organization (Halpin & Croft, 1963 as cited in Anderson, 1982); 3) *school culture research* which defines climate as a collective organization orientation as well as shared norms, values and ideologies and philosophies of individual and organizational behavior (Hoy, Tarter & Bliss, 1990).

Essentially, school climate is what takes place in and outside a classroom during school hours. School climate research focuses on the different levels of climate (Anderson 1982; Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; Litwin, & Barnes, 1968), and the types of academic and social support provided by the school, especially within the classroom for a positive climate (Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood, & Wisenbaker, 1978; Halpin and Croft, 1963; Moos, 1980; Walberg & Anderson, 1968).

Griffith (1997) provides a contemporary framework for better understanding school climate. School climate can be viewed through two domains: social order and social action (Stockard and Mayberry, 1992). Social order is the structure of the school and social action is the interactions that take place among students, staff and parents on a daily basis. *Social order* and *social action* both reflect activities oriented toward achievement/task completion and interpersonal relations (Griffith, 1997).

Findings suggest that there are within school variations of perceptions of school climate (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Rowan, Raudenbush, & Kang, 1991). Within school differences have been attributed to curriculum tracks, social background, and unique individual experiences in school. For example, Marsh and Cornell (2001) found that African American students felt less supported at school and perceived the school environment as more threatening and aggressive than White students. Black students were also found to perceive their school environment as not safe as compared to White students (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008). Research has shown that school climate and its relationship to academic outcomes may vary depending on the socioeconomic background of the student population (Battistich et al., 1995; Brookover et al., 1978; Griffith, 1997). In fact, studies have shown that there is a greater school

climate effect in schools with more socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Battistich et al., 1995, Shouse, 1996). Thus, school climate has a great influence on academic outcomes of socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Positive School Climate Factors and Dimensions

One aspect of a positive school climate is social support. Griffith (1997) defines social support as the interactions a student engages during the school day. Positive social support is needed for healthy identity and emotional development (Griffith, 1997). Positive school climate provides a safe and secure atmosphere generated by norms, expectations and values that motivate students to learn. Cohen et al (2009) identified four dimensions of school climate: safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and environmental-structural. School safety is a component of school climate that has received much attention in recent years. Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, & Konold (2009) identified three school climate factors that contribute to school safety: willingness to seek help, aggressive attitudes, and prevalence of teasing and bullying.

There are several factors that contribute to a positive school climate. These factors can be categorized into two dimensions: demandingness and responsiveness (McMahan, 2009). School climate is a reflection of many individual experiences and perceptions of the school (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009) and the school climate dimensions are used to categorize these experiences. School dimensions can be categorized as the attitudes of students, teachers and administrators as well as order, discipline, safety, and student participation; types of classes and instruction offered, and the common expectations and values within the school (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Griffith, 1997; McMahan, 2009).

Demandingness is having high expectations and responsiveness is providing support to help students meet those expectations. The dimensions include: strong leadership; staff with shared goals and visions (McMahan, 2009); attractive and safe working space, clear, concise and fair rules (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002); clear curricular goals; positive expectations for all students (Furlong, Greif, Bates, Whipple, Jimenez, & Morrison (2005); constructive and nurturing feedback, student autonomy and responsibility (Griffith, 2000); respectful and positive student-teacher interactions (Wilson, 2004); and opportunities for all students to actively participate in school activities (Blum, 2005).

These dimensions are fostered by connectedness and belonging (Benner & Graham, 2011; Cohen et al., 2009; McMahan, 2009). Additionally, research has shown that school membership/connectedness contributes to school achievement (Blum, 2005; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Smerdon, 2002). When students believe that their teachers care about them they become more connected to their school and their classmates (Johnson, 2009). Subsequently, when students feel connected to their school they perform better academically (Epstein, 1981a; Fraser, 1986) and have less psychological problems and demonstrate less maladaptive behaviors (Epstein, 1981a; Perry, Kelder, & Komro, 1993). In fact, the need to belong has been found across different ethnic groups (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005) and has been described as a universal human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci, Vallerland, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).

Griffith (1997) identified dimensions that contribute to the teaching and learning and the interpersonal relationships of students. He describes the two dimensions as

instrumental support and expressive support. Instrumental support provides necessary materials and procedures to successfully complete desired task and expressive support fosters positive feelings “in and among group members, motivate group members and maintain cohesion” (Griffith, p. 341).

Several studies have proposed different dimensions of school climate; however, for this study, school climate will be categorized as relationships among students, teachers and administration and structure and organization of the school. For example, student- teacher relationships and friendships would be categorized as interactions, while safety, types of learning instruction, and school policies would be categorized as structure and organization of the school.

School Climate and Achievement

School climate has been linked to different aspects of academic success (Griffith, 1997; Smerdon, 2002; Shirley & Cornell, 2011). Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, Burns, & Bolton (2008) emphasized peer commitment to pro-social behavior and greater support from teachers as key climate dimensions related to positive student adjustment in school. Griffith (1997) found that the day-to-day interactions between students and teachers were strongly related to self-reported academic performance and school satisfaction.

McEvoy and Welker (2000) argued that an effective school is one with a perceived safe environment, shares a common goal of high expectations of achievement for all students regardless of their background, and a shared commitment for appropriate assessments and the development of student efficacy. Having high expectations for all students and appropriate assessments has been linked to a positive school climate and academic achievement (McEvoy & Welker, 2000).

In addition, there is evidence that African American students are influenced by classroom interactions. Research provides strong evidence that there is a direct link between teacher support and expectations and African American students' self-efficacy, motivation, and school performance (Ferguson 2008; Payne 2008; Honara, 2003; Marcus, Gross, & Seefeldt, 1991).

Research on school climate is important because successful academic prevention and interventions hinge on identifying and modifying school climates in which academic failure emerge (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). School climate research challenges models of academic failure that rest on the assumption that schools can do little to alter the "deficits" that "disadvantaged" students bring to the classroom (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). In fact, research has shown that school environment is can alter school achievement, because school climate has a significant influence on student engagement and academic outcomes (McMahan, 2009; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Brand and colleagues (2008) found a relationship between school climate and student adjustment. Recent research has also emphasized the connection between positive socio-emotional adjustment and positive school climate as indicated by peer pro social behavior and positive teacher support (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, and Dumas, 2003).

School racial climate and tracking have been linked to negative school climate. Although research has shown that tracking is often found in schools with diverse populations and this leads to a racialized system of tracking (Carter, 2005; Tyson, 2011) little research has assessed tracking and racial climate's influence on overall school climate.

School Racial Climate, Racial Discrimination and Racialized Experiences

School racial climate is the interaction between different races and the messages given and received about race, diversity and culture (Chavous, 2005; Chauvos, RivasDrake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008). Adolescents are acutely aware of their race and are able to discern racial discrimination and prejudice (Shirley& Cornell, 2011), due to highly developed cognitive abilities. Adolescents are also more cognizant of how they are viewed by others (Shirley & Cornell, 2011; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). “Information that youths appraise from interactions in their social contexts influences how they develop understandings of themselves in relation to the social groups to which they belong” (Chavous, RivasDrake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, p.638).

Research has revealed that adolescents reports of personal racial discrimination often occur within the school setting (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Scott, 2003). It is not uncommon for Black students to have experienced racial discrimination in the form of racial slurs and verbal insults at some point during their academic career (Fisher et al, 2000; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). It is reasonable to hypothesize that school based discrimination increases stress and strongly influences academic engagement (Fisher, et al, 2000; Scott, 2003; Wong et al, 2003).

However, there have been very few studies that have closely examined the role of racial discrimination at school on student achievement. This relationship is important because much of the current literature concerning Black student achievement emphasizes students’ beliefs about society and perceived racial group barriers that lead to the formation of oppositional identities (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) or school disengagement (Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 2003; Osborne 1997).

Much of the current research on differential treatment and school racial discrimination focuses on the experiences of Black boys. Black males often receive less preferential treatment at school including harsher disciplinary practices and more negative criticism (Noguera, 2003; Simpson & Erikson, 1983). Chavous and colleagues (2008) found that boys reported more classroom discrimination than girls. Unfortunately, the way Black boys respond to negative treatment may negatively influence their academic achievement (Spencer, Fegley, Harpalani, & Seaton, 2004).

Black boys may devalue experiences in the academic domain to protect their self-concept, self-esteem and self-respect (Graham, et al, 1998; Osborne, 1999, Cunningham, 1999). Disengagement is a self-protective strategy and is used to cope with threatening information, information that may damage self-esteem. Disengagement from the academic domain can cause a student to lose motivation to achieve academically, because their self-concept will not depend on success in the domain (Major & Schmader, 1998). There are two pathways to psychological disengagement: devaluing and discontinuing.

A student may devalue the academic domain so that discouraging results are not important to how he or she defines the self. Therefore, to protect self-esteem stigmatized minorities may place less value on academic outcomes. Thus, when they experience negative treatment from teachers and peers based on their racial group they adopt negative academic strategies (Grantham & Ford, 1998; Grantham & Ford, 2003).

It is reasonable to suspect that school based discrimination increases stress and strongly influences academic engagement. It is apparent that African American students are influenced by classroom interactions. If Black students are experiencing racial discrimination and prejudice within the classroom it could lead to academic under-

performance. Research provides strong evidence that there is a direct link between teacher support and expectations and African American students' self-efficacy, motivation, and school performance (Ferguson, 2008; Marcus, Gross, & Seefeldt, 1991; Noguera, 2003).

Tracking and Ability Grouping

Tracking and ability grouping have been linked to negative school climate (McElvoy & Welker, 2000). Schools that have grouping rather de jure or de facto, have an undeniable effects on academic self-concept. Brookover and colleagues (1978) assert that ability grouping undermines positive school climate by creating divisions along social and racial lines and creating conditions for academic failure. Ability grouping undermines a basic tenet of a positive school climate, and high expectations that all students can achieve and meet grade level mastery (McElvoy and Welker, 2000). Ability grouping in a school can foster feelings of futility especially among students in low level classes (Oakes, 1985).

There are several definitions of tracking used in contemporary society. For example, Rosenbaum (1976) defines tracking as “any school selection system that attempts to homogenize classroom placements in terms of student's personal qualities, performance or aspirations.” While Oakes (1985) considers tracking a process whereby students are divided into categories and assigned to various classes. Hallinan (1994) defines it as “the practice of assigning students to instructional groups on the basis ability.”

Curriculum grouping is based on student's perceived educational and occupational plans and differentiates instruction accordingly. Students are considered

fast, average or slow based on achievement test scores. In many schools teachers or counselors determine a student's track based on the teacher or counselors predictions of that students future, as a result they may place student on a vocational or academic track. In contemporary schools, the tracking system is often replaced by course levels: advanced, honors, regular or basic. Assignment to levels is based on grades, standardized exams, teachers' and counselors' recommendations, course prerequisites and prior track placement (Oakes, 1985; Sadovnik, 2007).

Early research on ability grouping concluded that there is no substantial evidence that ability grouping increases learning (Miller and Otto, 1930; Rock, 1929), However there are studies that claim a small increase in achievement for homogeneous groups compared to heterogeneous groups (Wyndham, 1934, Figlio & Page, 2002). Miles (1954) found that gifted students often benefit more from homogeneous groups. On the other hand Goodlad (1960 as cited in Slavin, 1987) found that low achieving students benefited more than the gifted students. Current research has shown that tracking is most pervasive at the high school level and that some schools divide students by vocational or academic track, but most schools divide based on curriculum: advanced placement, enriched, average, basic or remedial (Oakes, 1985).

As with earlier studies (Eeash, 1961; Svensson, 1962). Oakes (1985) found that poor and minority students were tracked to lower level classes. Biafora and Ansalone's (2008) study on school principals found that schools that represent students of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to be in favor of tracking. In this study I found that although many teachers did not believe tracking was beneficial to their students, it was easier to teach to homogeneous groups. This study also revealed that tracking is often a

response to political and socioeconomic circumstances (Biafora & Ansalone, 2008). Is also found that parents of high SES were more likely to complain about tracking and consequently principals at schools with higher Socioeconomic status favored tracking less than administrators at schools with lower socioeconomic status students.

Furthermore, ability grouping perpetuates social and racial biases and reduces equal education opportunities for minorities and students of lower socio-economic status (Eash, 1961; Svensson, 1962). When a student is tracked into low-level courses they are being labeled as less academic or less intelligent and in turn they may internalize these characteristics as attributes that cannot change (Oakes, 1985). Eash (1961) found that ability grouping influences a student's perception of self and their self-dignity and self-worth. Teachers also perceive students who are tracked into lower levels as less intelligent and as having less academic ability (Gamoran & Berends. 1987).

Subsequently, students who are tracked into lower levels experience low self-esteem and motivation (Lucas, 1999; Oakes, 1985). Students live up to the expectation that they cannot perform at a higher standard, and because they have internalized the label as less academic; they become unmotivated to do well (Rist as cited in Sadovnik, 2007). Many students who are tracked into lower level classes have high anti-school sentiment (Goldberg, Passow & Justman, 1966; Rosenbaum, 1980).

Racialized tracking contributes to perceptions of academic ability and capacity. When students see classes categorized as "advanced" consisting of predominately White students and, "regular" or "remedial" consisting of predominately Black students this strengthens Black and White student's perceptions of White as intelligent and Black as less intelligent (Payne, 2008).

Voluntary Tracking

Recent research has revealed that although Black students are “voluntarily” choosing to take lower level classes it not due to an oppositional culture or a fear of being teased (Carter, 2005; Tyson, Darity & Castellino, 2005; Tyson, 2011). Oppositional Culture is the term coined by John Ogbu (1985) that asserted that Black student under-perform because they associate academic success with Whiteness (burden of acting White). However, studies have shown that high achieving Black students are not suffering from a “burden of acting White” (Carter, 2005; Tyson, 2011; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005) and instances where they do are more than likely in schools with diverse populations (Tyson, 2011). Research has also revealed that Black students do not voluntarily take advanced classes because they do not want to be isolated from their Black peers (Carter, 2005; Tyson, 2011; Tyson et al, 2005).

Tyson et al (2005) found that most Black students did not feel as if they were pressured to under-perform nor were they discouraged from taking advanced courses due to the fear of being labeled as “acting White” by their Black friends. Black students valued academic achievement however they feared not doing well in advanced classes. They were more concerned about the grades they would receive over the quality of education they would receive (Tyson, 2011). Many high achieving Black students did not view “doing well” as exclusive to taking advanced level classes. Because these students had such a desire to do well in school they avoided advanced courses out of fear of failure. An important question is why are they afraid to take these courses? And how has the school system encouraged this thinking? Steel (1992) would argue that this fear is based on confirming negative stereotypes of one's racial group.

Summary

School climate is a very important aspect of a student's overall school experience and research has shown that it is linked to academic achievement (McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Although there are several dimensions of school climate that range from safety to curriculum and instruction, this study will focus on the interactions that occur within the school. Specifically this study will discuss school racial climate and tracking, two factors that are not often discussed in the school climate literature.

Much of the literature focuses on Black student behavior; however there is a lack of research that focuses on school level variables such as interactions between students and teachers as well as policies and school practices that dictate individual academic behavior. School policies and practices such as tracking and ability grouping are important aspects of the overall school climate.

Individual Factors

Academic Self-Concept

Perceptions of academic ability, enjoyment of school and interest in school are all important components of academic self-concept (Ireson & Hallam, 2009). Cokley (2003) describes academic self-concept as a combination of cognitive appraisals and emotional judgements of one's academic skills. Academic self-concept has been a construct differentiated from self-concept, with self-concept referring to global self-perception and academic self-concept referring to perception of academic competence (Ireson & Hallam, 2009). Self-concept is defined as the perceptions people have of themselves. Researchers agree that self-concept is multidimensional and multi-faceted (Bong & Skaalvik 2003; Marsh, Byrne and Shavelson, 1988). Academic self-concept is a subcomponent of self-

concept and can be further divided into four categories: English, History, Math and Science.

Several studies have shown that academic self-concept is consistently linked to overall GPA (Cokley, 2000a; Reynolds, 1988; Witherspoon, Speight and Thomas, 1997 as cited in Cokley, Komarraju, King, Cunningham, & Muhammad, 2003).

There are two distinct lines of thought concerning academic self-concept: one position is that academic self-concept is one-dimensional, and that academic behaviors are more influenced by academic self- concept (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997) and the second position is that academic self-concept is multidimensional and variable based on specific domains thus measures should be subject specific (Marsh, 1990; Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988). In their review, Marsh and Yeung (1988) found a reciprocal relationship- whereby “prior self-concept predicts subsequent achievement and prior achievement predicts subsequent self-Concept” (Guay, Ratelle, Roy, & Litalien, 2010, p.645).

Three models describe the relationship of academic self-concept and achievement (Marsh & Martin, 2011:

- Self enhancement model. This model depicts academic achievement as the result of academic self-concept;
- Skill development model. This model depicts academic self-concept as the result of academic achievement,
- Model of causal relationship. This model posits that academic self-concept and academic achievement influences each other simultaneously (Guay et al 2010; Calsyn & Kenny, 1977).

Research has revealed that self-concept is not inherent; it is formed through interactions with the environment (Bong & Clark, 1999; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985 as cited in Liu, 2009). Students create their academic self-concept through social comparison: students compare their ability with others in their frame of reference (Marsh & Parker, 1984). It is argued that students' academic self-concept also influences the type of courses that students choose to take (Marsh & Yeung, 1997).

There is no clear direction of academic self-concept development. Research has shown that academic self-concept declines from early to mid-adolescence (Liu and Wang 2005). Furthermore, Marsh (1989) found that middle adolescence has the lowest level of self-concept. On the other hand, Guay et al (2003) found that the relationship between academic self-concept and achievement becomes stronger as the student gets older.

Research has also investigated ethnic and gender differences in academic self-concept. Cokley et al (2003) found that there are important differences concerning perceptions and beliefs of ability and the relationship between effort and grades. This suggests that different subscales should be considered when assessing African American students. Additionally, differences have been found across gender groups. Gender differences have been found for academic self-concept; however it is argued that these differences are a product of a global sense of self: physical appearance and social relationships (Byrne, 1988; Marsh, 1990b cited in Ireson & Hallam 2009).

Ireson and Hallam (2009) found that socioeconomic status was not a predictor of academic self-concept. However, Ireson et al (2001), in an earlier study, found that socioeconomic status was related to differences in grades and academic self-concept.

The difference may be explained by the age of the students assessed in each study. The 2009 study looked at 14-16 year olds; the previous study looked at younger students.

Research on the effects of ability grouping on self-concept has yielded conflicting results. Some findings reveal no relationship between ability grouping and self-concept (Cheung and Rudowics, 2003; Kulik and Kulik, 1982; Loveless, 1998). However, other studies found significant effects of ability grouping on academic self-concept (Liu, Wang, Parkins, 2005; Slavin, 1990; Ireson, Hallam and Plewis, 2001; Byrne 1990).

Ireson et al (2001) found that academic self-concept and general self-concept were linked to ability grouping. Schools with high levels of ability grouping had more students with lower academic self-concept. Ireson & Hallam (2009) found that academic self-concept was related to the degree of ability grouping in the school they attended. They also found that students in high ability groups had significantly higher self-concepts.

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat is being at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about one's social group. When a student experiences stereotype threat he or she may underperform due to the anxiety and stress created from fear of confirming a negative stereotype. Stereotype threat can occur when an individual belonging to a stereotyped group is in a situation in which the negative stereotype might be applied; this causes anxiety and fear that he or she may confirm the stereotype (Steele, 1997). For example, Black Americans are negatively stereotyped as less intelligent than White Americans. An awareness of this stereotype can cause Black students to question whether they will be viewed as less intelligent.

Research has shown that stereotype threat can lead to negative academic self-concept. Black students who encounter prejudice or extreme racialized environments are at a greater risk for stereotype threat. Students who have a strong identification with the school domain are the most susceptible to stereotype threat (Steele, 1997). These students feel extra “pressure” to represent their race or gender in a positive light and not confirm negative stereotypes. For example, African Americans may feel extra pressure to do well on a standardized test to disconfirm the stereotype that African Americans are not as intelligent as other groups.

Steele and Aronson (1995) demonstrated the impact of stereotypes on behavior. They brought Black and White students into the laboratory and gave them the most difficult items on the Verbal GRE. These students were put in two groups: One group was told that the test was diagnostic of their academic abilities and the other group was told that the test was non-diagnostic of their academic abilities. The results showed that in the diagnostic condition, Black students did far worse, but in the non-diagnostic condition their scores equaled White students. Steele and Aronson (1995) suggest that the presence or priming of a negative stereotype can impair performance. In this study, stating that the test was a diagnostic test and would determine intellectual ability was enough to cause Black students to perform a full standard deviation lower than White students.

There is abundant empirical support for the idea that stereotype threat can affect individuals of any stereotyped social group. This phenomenon has been found in African Americans, Latinos, and women (Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998; Griffin, 2002). Research has shown that stereotype threat requires neither stigmatization nor internalized

feelings of inferiority. For example, Aronson and colleagues (1999) conducted a study on a social group that appears to be the most unlikely group to have internalized inferiority, White males, and showed that they also could experience stereotype threat. The results were supportive of the general hypothesis that highly identified White male students would underperform if the Asian stereotype was made salient. “In theory, stereotype threat derives its power from a motive common to all individuals, regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and so on--the motive to sustain a self-image of goodness or competence and of being able to secure important outcomes” (Aronson et al., 1999, p. 31). This research illustrates that stereotype threat can occur regardless of minority status or stigma.

According to Aronson, Quinn, and Spencer (1998), stereotype threat effects are partly mediated by domain identification and will most likely weaken the performances of individuals who are highly identified with the domain being tested. Due to generations of exposure to negative stereotypes, members of stigmatized groups may begin to internalize these negative stereotypes. The stereotype does not directly affect the performance expectations of test takers, but can create stereotype anxiety, which “manifests in self-evaluative pressure, and impairs test-taking efficiency” (Morgan & Mehta, 2004, p. 84). If the student adapts to the predicament that he or she will not do well in the academic domain, disidentification can occur (Morgan & Mehta, 2004).

Devaluing and Discounting

Recent research has focused on how targets of negative stereotypes and prejudice cope with these experiences (Major & Schmader, 1998). Students may use several different coping strategies to handle the disappointment of poor grades, such as

psychological disengagement which is the defensive detachment of self-esteem from a particular domain (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). Disengagement is a self-protective strategy and is used to cope with threatening information, information that may damage self-esteem. Disengagement from the academic domain can cause a student to lose motivation to achieve academically because their self-concept will not depend on success in the domain (Major & Schmader, 1998).

There are two pathways to psychological disengagement: devaluing and discounting. One possible explanation for this finding is that discounting can be viewed as a type of buffer, providing a safeguard against the internalization of poor achievement results. Therefore, discounting may provide a way to maintain motivation despite discouraging results. Psychological disengagement is often used by ethnic minority students in the academic domain (Major et al, 1998; Schmader et al, 2001; Steele 1997). There is evidence that perceived discrimination and grades are related to disengagement (Schmader et al, 2001; Verkuuyten & Thijs, 2004). A student may devalue the academic domain so that upsetting results will not lower his or her self-esteem or his or her perception of the self.

Therefore, to protect self-esteem stigmatized minorities may place less value on academic outcomes. Although Black students may not devalue education entirely, they may devalue the results or outcomes they receive in the educational system. Therefore if they receive a low grade or have a low GPA, it will not damage their image of themselves. Members of stigmatized groups may be able to maintain high levels of self-esteem by attributing negative outcomes to prejudice and discrimination. The discounting of performance evaluations should undermine Black students' motivation to achieve by

weakening the tie between academic and overall sense of self (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998).

Morgan and Mehta (2004) suggest that Black students formulate their own opinions of their academic competence and discount the validity of past and present performance. If this conclusion is true, and Black students believe that performance evaluations are unreliable (blatantly and systematically unfair), then they may reallocate their overall self-esteem away from their own academic self-concept and invest it in other domains. Regner and Loose (2006) found that ethnic students were more likely to discount academic grades than to devalue the academic domain. Their analysis revealed that grades were negatively related to discounting, but grades were positively related to academic self-esteem.

Identification and Disengagement

A common assumption in research on the academic self-concept is that academic success is dependent on how identified the individual is with the academic domain. “To sustain school success one must be identified with school achievement in the sense of it being a part of one’s self definition, a personal identity to which one is self-evaluatively accountable” (Steele, 1997, p. 613). To be identified, one must feel a sense of belongingness and feel valued in the domain.

There are several interpretations of identification. According to Osborne (1997), “Identification with academics is the extent to which one’s self-evaluation in a particular area affects one’s overall self-evaluation” (p. 728). Griffin (2002) describes academic identification as a strong link to academic success. The more a student succeeds, the more identified with school the student will be because “students have internalized important

aspects of schooling to the point that their perception of self is shaped, to some extent, by their performance” (p. 71). Although the concept of academic identification is distinct from other concepts such as academic self-concept and academic self-esteem, these constructs are all empirically related.

Research on academic disidentification is an extension of previous research conducted on Black-White differences in regards to self-esteem and academic achievement. This research has shown that Black students’ level of global self-esteem is equal to or higher than that of White students, but on average Black students underperform in the academic domain (Graham, 1997). Another study revealed significant differences between Black and White students’ self-esteem (Cokley, 2002): Black students’ mean self-esteem score was 2.50 while White students’ mean score was 2.16. There is an assumption that if one has a high global self-esteem they will have a high academic self-concept. However, this is not always the case with Black students. This paradox can be explained by using William James’s principle of selective valuation: we seek to excel in areas in which we identify, but we also identify with areas in which we excel (Rosenberg, 1979). Based on this principle, we can presume that Black students are able to maintain high self-esteem despite lower academic performance, by basing their self-esteem on non-academic performances. From this perspective, disidentification can be considered a long-term defense against the chronic exposure to negative stereotypes and poor academic performance.

Disidentification with a domain protects self-esteem because poor performances have little consequences on self-evaluations (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). This being said, some research suggests little

differences between the academic self-concept of Black and White students (Morgan & Mehta, 2004). Black students are just as likely as White students to feel upset about their sense of self if they have a high regard for their academic competence. Steele (1992) views academic disidentification as the missing link between global self-esteem and academic self-esteem. Osborne (1997) states, “students who are more identified with academics should be more motivated to succeed because their self-esteem is directly linked to academic performance” (p. 728). Therefore, “students not identified with academics should experience lower motivation to succeed because there is no contingency between academic outcomes and self-esteem” (p. 728).

If a student does not encounter belongingness and a sense of value in the domain, he or she is in danger of becoming disidentified with the domain. Disidentification is a “protective process through which the motivation to achieve declines because conceptions of overall self-worth are gradually separated from performance in school” (Morgan & Mehta, 2004, p. 83). In contrast to stereotype threat, which does not directly lower motivation, disidentification can directly lower motivation and this decrease in motivation can impede future performance (Morgan & Mehta, 2004).

Steele (1997) argues that all African Americans, even those that have succeeded academically, are subject to disidentification. Most studies on disidentification focus on college students, however, Osborne (1997) studied high school students to determine if they experience disidentification, and he concluded that Black boys were the most disidentified group followed by Black girls, Hispanic boys with Hispanic girls exhibiting the more identification. A study conducted by Cokley (2002) confirmed that Black boys disidentify to a greater extent than Black girls.

In contrast, Morgan and Mehta (2004) argue that Black students remained as fully identified with schooling as do Whites students. Black and White students of similar background do not differ on behaviors such as absenteeism or homework time. This study suggests that Black students discount performance evaluations but remain identified with achievement. For example, a Black student may continue to believe in the achievement ideology and academic achievement but reject the feedback that they receive from their teacher if they believe that the teacher does not like them or if they think the teacher is racist.

Motivation

Motivation is a key factor of academic success. Motivation is one's desire to achievement. It is the reason one has for behaving in a certain manner as well as one's willingness to engage in a particular behavior. Individuals can be intrinsically motivated to achieve a task or extrinsically motivated. When one is intrinsically motivated, he or she engages in the task because they find it inherently enjoyable. Unfortunately, most tasks are encouraged by extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is based on a drive for an external reward; such as working solely for a paycheck every two weeks or working to get an A, with little regard for actual learning. Atkinson (1964) asserted that one essential component of motivation was motives.

Motives are often defined as a stable psychological need to strive for a particular type of emotional consequence. Research on academic achievement and motivation identifies two kinds of motives: motive to succeed and motive to avoid failure. Motives increase one's sensitivity to the emotions attached to succeeding or failing a task.

Early research on motives, characterized them as an internal state, need or condition that pushes individuals to behave in a particular way (Woodworth, 1918). However, current research view motives as psychological need for power, social approval and achievement (Covington, 2000). Atkinson (1964) and McClelland evolved theory further by declaring that achievement results from conflicts between striving for success and avoiding failure. The majority of research on motivation frames it in emotional terms (Covington, 2000). For example, the pride one feels when winning a game or prevailing in a difficult task will drive the individual to adopt performance-oriented approach on the other hand shame from losing a game or failing to prevail over a difficult task will drive him to adopt an avoidance approach.

Contemporary research on motivation focuses more on how “goals” entice people to engage in certain behaviors and act in particular ways (Elliot & Dweck, 1988, Wolters, 2004). Currently, research differentiates between mastery goals and performance goals. Mastery goals are designated as learning to increase competency, understanding, and appreciation for what is learned (Ames, 1992; Roberts, 1992). Performance goals are designated as goals that enhance the ego (Nicholls, 1989; Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 1998). These goals influence achievement via cognitive self-regulation processes (Covington, 2000). Self-regulation involves students actively pursuing learning; students analyze and understand the demands of an assignment, thus they plan and mobilize resources to meet those demands (Pintrich, 1999; Zimmerman, 1990; Zimmerman et al, 1994). Empirical studies indicate that students who espouse a master goal orientation are more likely to engage in positive self-regulatory behavior (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Legget, 1988; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Students in this category are more likely to exert greater

effort to monitor their understanding of what is being learned and adjusting behavior to accommodate learning (Meece & Holt, 1993; Middleton & Midgley, 1997). Most importantly, these students are most likely to make positive attributions for occasional failure. They recognize that ability is not fixed and that effort is the key to success and that failure does not indicate incompetence, but the need to employ new learning strategies (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Nicholls, 1984). Wilbrowski (1992) found that successful minority high school students were more likely to demonstrate greater persistence and more self-regulation than less successful minority students.

Research has also established a link between deep level processing and positive academic achievement (Covington, 1992). Data tends to link performance goal orientation with superficial, shallow-level processing (Karabenick & Collins-Eaglin, 1997; Pintrich et al 1993). Due to the goal and need to outperform others, students who engage in performance-approach exert considerable effort in study strategies and other resources to ensure a positive outcome (Wolters, Shirley, & Pintrich, 1996). By contrast, students who engage in the performance-avoidance approach main objective are to avoid failure. These students engage in strategies such as exerting less effort and less persistence, in order to avoid looking incompetent (Bouffard et al 1995), thus having an excuse for performing poorly (Pintrich, 1999). Students who adopt performance approach or performance avoidance both employ self-protective strategies driven by a fear of looking incompetent. Elliot et al (1999) found that shallow processing was correlated with performance/avoidance goals. In addition, performance driven by the fear of failure, regardless of outcome is psychologically taxing (Wolters, 2004).

Current research examines the structure of an environment as related to motivation. Several studies have shown a positive relationship between the type of classroom environment (Mastery vs. Performance) and students' goal orientation (Anderman & Migley, 1997; Anderman & Young, 1994; Kaplan & Weber, 2001). However, it is still unclear if students' perception of their classroom goal orientation can predict their adoption of a goal orientation (Wolters, 2004). Conversely, Elliot, McGregor, and Gable (1999) found that performance approach was related to self-reported effort and persistence in college students.

Attributions

Attribution theory focuses on the causes people hold responsible for success or failure (McMahan, 2009). Explanations for outcomes affect feelings about the outcome, willingness to engage in the activity again, and expectancies for future results. There are four types of attributions: effort, task, ease/difficulty, and luck (McMahan, 2009). Ability is the belief that one has natural talent; effort is the belief that outcome is based on how hard one works; task is the belief that outcome is dependent on the ease of the task; luck is the belief that the outcome is arbitrary. These four categories can be categorized into two causal dimensions: whether the cause is seen as internal or external and if cause is deemed stable or unstable (McMahan, 2009).

Attributions are conceptually related to how hard one works as well as how one perceives his or her academic performance. For example, if a student believes that a good grade is based on an assignment being easy and not on effort, the student may devalue the grade. The way one attributes academic performance can also be linked to views of intelligence. Research has shown that students who view intelligence as

malleable and not fixed put more effort into an academic task (Dweck, 2000).

Furthermore, there is a link between goal orientation and attributions (Springer, 2010).

Students who are performance oriented are less likely to persist with challenging task (Springer, 2010).

Summary

Academic self-concept and motivation cognitively are connected and are influenced by the environment. Academic self-concept is how one perceives his or her academic ability. Research has shown that this perception of ability can be altered by specific experiences and that one's experiences can alter perceived ability.

Academic performance is also linked to motivation. Students must be motivated or have a desire to perform well. However, this desire can be altered by academic self-concept. If students do not think that they will do well it can decrease motivation to exert effort. The school climate can also shape motivation, specifically school policies such as tracking. Research has shown that students in lower levels have less motivation than student in upper levels (Oakes, 1985).

Theoretical Framework

In this study, school climate refers to the daily interactions of students with school policies and practices. This examined students' perceptions of these interactions and the school policies. Additionally, this study examined how school climate interacts with academic self-concept and student motivation. I described a framework for studying student achievement using two broad domains: school level factors and individual level factors.

This study used three theories (Critical Race Theory, Achievement Goal Theory, and Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory) to better understand the differential outcomes of Black and White students at PHS High School. These three theories were used because I wanted to see how racial background is related to school discrimination for adolescents in a high school setting.

Critical Race Theory provides a lens for understanding how race plays a role in the differential outcomes, while Achievement Goal Theory provides a lens for understanding why students are motivated to learn. The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory provides a lens for understanding adolescent development, but specifically how development is contextual and how it differs in regard to racial background. This approach allowed me to consider how physiological, cognitive and emotional factors interact with environmental factors. Additionally, this approach provides a lens to examine perceptions of school experiences.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) asserts that any analysis of educational inequality must have race as the central variable (Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). This theory provides a lens through which to view the links between student outcomes and social structures. The

framework is very explicit about the social construction of race and the impact of racism. Critical race theorists are not only concerned with establishing equality, they are also concerned with exposing past racial transgressions and their consequences in hopes of solutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theorists view the educational system as an institution created to reproduce unequal power relations and academic outcomes (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). This view is similar to reproduction theorists. However unlike reproduction theory this theory has race as the central construct.

CRT asserts that racism is normal not aberrational. Meaning it is a normal daily experience of most Black people (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). In current society, daily racism is carried out through microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle forms of racism and discrimination that are not often easy to categorize as racist acts (Solarzona, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). For example, if a teacher tells a Black student that she should not take an advanced level class because it will be too challenging, this could be viewed as racial discrimination or stereotyping, or it could be viewed as the teacher knowing what is best for this particular student. This study documented the occurrence of microaggressions at PHS High school and described how microaggressions undermine the academic performance of Black students at PHS High School.

Critical race theorists argue that “master” narratives are not objective and that schools represent the major route for disseminating the truths of the dominant society (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). CRT’s goal is to broaden the truths to include the narratives of people of color and to “provide educators with a set of tools to challenge the policies and practices that privilege the experiences and the tacit truths of the dominant group” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011, p. 5). CRT understands that to completely understand the complexities of educational inequalities, there should be an interdisciplinary approach. As such, this research attempted to integrate theories and concepts from both sociology and psychology.

CRT also goes beyond the interdisciplinary approach to assert that I should rely on his or her own racial background and experiences to interpret and produce knowledge. This theory asserts that most academic fields exclude minority voices in the discourse on race and civil rights (Delgado & Stefancic, 1995).

Achievement Goal Theory

Achievement Goal theory is a major component of motivational research (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). This theory developed from a social-cognitive framework and suggests that students' motivation and academic behaviors is best understood when understanding their reasons for engaging in academic work (Ames, 1992; Urdan, 1997). Achievement goal theory has emerged as a new direction in motivational research that focuses on how students think about themselves, their tasks, and their performance (Midgley et al, 1998). In line with the social-cognitive framework, achievement goal theory provides a means to better understand differences in how individuals interpret and react to events and why different patterns of cognition, affect and behavior occur (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Midgley et al (1998) defines achievement goals as "purposes or reasons for achievement behavior" (p. 115).

Early research only focused on two types of goals, mastery goals and performance goals. However current research distinguishes between four types of goal orientations: *mastery-approach*, *mastery-avoidance*, *performance-approach*, and *performance avoidance* (Wolters, 2004). Mastery approach is a focus on learning and overcoming challenges. This approach is linked to intrinsic motivation, students want to increase their level of competence. On the other hand, mastery-avoidance orientation refers to students who work in order to avoid a failure to learn as much as possible. Performance-approach is linked to extrinsic motivation as the student is focused on demonstrating their ability to others to prove their self-worth. The fourth orientation, performance-avoidance, describes students whose main objective is to avoid looking incompetent, lacking ability or less able than their peers (Wolters, 2004).

Achievement goal theory recognizes that the structure of an environment can affect students' motivation, cognitive engagement and achievement (Ames & Archer, 1988). Schools and classroom practices are directly related to motivation. Goal structure “describes the type of achievement goal emphasized by the prevailing instructional practices and policies within a classroom, school, or other learning environment. For instance, the types of tasks assigned, the grading procedures, the degree of autonomy students are provided, and the way students are grouped are thought to affect the achievement goals students adopt” (Wolters, p. 236). Previous studies have shown that motivation goals are moderated by the task, perceived competence and if the task is perceived as a challenge or a threat (Elliot and Church, 1997; Elliot & Dweck 1998),

Research has identified two types of structures within schools: mastery goal structures and performance goal structures. Mastery goal structures promote the importance of learning, values all students, and believes all students can learn if they work hard and convey this message through instructional practices, school policies and norms (Wolters, 2004). On the other hand, performance goal structure describes an environment that promotes success based on extrinsic rewards and competition (Wolters, 2004).

Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory

The crux of the overall framework is based on an ecological systems approach. This approach stresses the interaction of structures both within the student, such as physical, cognitive, and emotional, as well as in the student's environment, such as family, peers, school, and the community (McMahan, 2009). For example, classroom interactions with the teacher can affect how a student thinks of himself, and the way the student thinks of himself can affect the student's stress level. A student's stress level can affect motivation and subsequently, motivation can affect the student's academic performance. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) established, social settings interact to influence identity development. Integrating an ecologic systems approach with a phenomenological perspective allows me to form a “more dynamic, culturally responsive,

context-sensitive perspective for interpreting the individual's own meaning making process” (Spencer et al, p. 828)

The phenomenological variant of ecological systems (PVEST) is a framework that has been described as “the processing of phenomena and experiences not only influences how much one feels valued or valuable (e.g. self-esteem), but it also influences how one gives meaning and significance to different aspects of oneself (e.g., abilities, physical attributes, behaviors, and activities)” (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann 1997, p. 817). PVEST combines Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory with an emphasis on individuals' experiences in different contexts.) . More precisely, the perceptions of those experiences dictate how one perceives oneself, and the response coping methods and corrective- problem solving one engages (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). The types of coping methods and problem solving strategies are linked to identity development (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). In fact, self-perceptions (identity) can determine how one will adapt to different cultural contexts, and how students view their abilities and how they adopt or suppress certain behaviors and activities (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartman, 1997).

Far too often, research has taken a reductionist approach, with White children serving as the norm and minority children seen as a deviation. In almost every area of academic research, Black children's schooling and identity development has been viewed as “pathology or deviance” (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, Harpalani, 2001). Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) “acting White” theory has aided the consistent pathological stereotyping of Black students and continues to compare and contrast them to White cultural identity ” (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, Harpalani, 2001). This type of research highlights negative adaptive processes and ignores positive or protective factors such as resiliency and persistence. Consequently, current research has begun to question how students develop their own beliefs about self-concept as an explanation for academic performance or

whether they believe and accept the assumptions, stereotypes, and expectations of others (Spencer et al, 1997; Spencer et al, 2001; Chavous et al, 2008).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

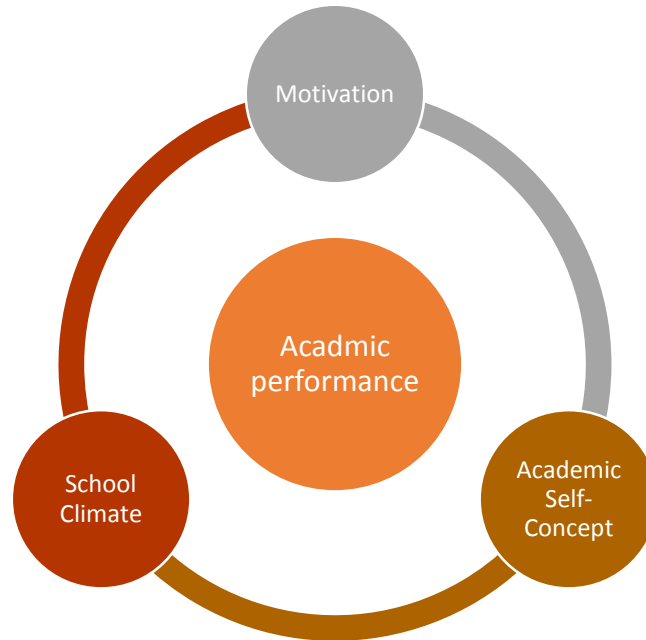


Figure 1. Describes the conceptual model: Climate= racial discrimination, microaggressions, racial tension, teacher expectation, teacher perceptions, student teacher relationship, affirmation, feedback on ability, leveling policy, pedagogy. Motivation= Motives, relevancy and interest in subject matter, goal orientation (mastery vs. performance), personality traits (competiveness), individualism, fear of failure, self – protection. Academic self-concept= perceived ability, confidence, self-doubt, academic identification, stereotype threat.

Summary

The theoretical framework used in this study provided a foundation for the examination of school climate, academic self-concept and motivation at the high school level. Furthermore, each theory provided specific measures, constructs and methods to asses each individual concept. However, when these theories were combined, the framework created a lens through which relationships among school climate, academic self-concept and motivation could be determined.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter describes the methods and methodology that were used in this study.

This study used a mixed-methods triangulation design. I examined the nature of differential academic outcomes of high school students from within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm. The aim of this study was threefold. First, I explored the school policies and academic and social structures. Then, I explored how students' classroom experiences and perceptions varied, based on achievement level. I examined differences between lower level and upper level classrooms in classroom pedagogy, curriculum and instruction, and student engagement. Finally, I explored the ways in which students perceived their experiences and interpreted their interactions with teachers and peers. In striving to meet the aims of this study this dissertation explored qualitative and quantitative questions:

Qualitative Research Questions:

4. What is the school climate and culture?
5. How is race related to the school ability grouping practices?
6. How is student "level" related to academic self-concept and motivation?
 - a. How do classroom practices and strategies influence academic self-concept and motivation?
 - b. What are academic self-concept, motivation and behavioral differences between upper level students and lower level students?
 - c. What are academic self-concept and motivation differences between Black students and White students?

Quantitative Research Questions:

4. How do students' score on the survey measures of academic self-concept, climate and motivation?

5. What are the relationships among the measures?
6. How is race, gender and level related to each measure?

Research Design: Mixed Methods and Triangulation

A mixed-methods design includes collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). This study not only used a mixed method paradigm, it also used several research methods and multiple data collection techniques. Mixed methods design is used when one research method is not sufficient to answer a complex question (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Howard (2007) asserts that mixed methods allows research to answer both “what” and “why” questions; quantitative data typically describe what has happened, while qualitative data can provide information on “why” it is happening.

Qualitative research addressed questions by investigating issues within a social setting. Qualitative research seeks to understand the inhabitants of various social settings, specifically how the inhabitants “make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles and so forth” (Berg, Lune, & Lune, 2004, p. 7). Conversely, quantitative research is typically more structured. There is a standard set of procedures and uniform protocols. Results are quantified and analyzed in a uniform manner, allowing other researchers to easily understand the results (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2004). Thus, qualitative data and quantitative data can complement each other and can lead to a rich data set with a more complete analysis and understanding of the phenomenon.

Triangulation is a technique used to gather different points of view or “lines of sight”. Berg (2004) states that when researchers are observing events, “researchers assume reality is deeply affected by the actions of all participants, including themselves” (p. 5).

Triangulation not only provides I with an awareness of differing points of view but it also includes the use of multiple data collection techniques, multiple theories, multiple researchers and multiple methodologies (Denzin, 1978). This study used mixed methods to “obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality” (Berg, 2004, p.5). This study included several different theoretical perspectives as well as different data collection techniques.

The qualitative portion of this study allows for an in-depth examination the school climate, specifically the school structure and racial dynamics. The qualitative methods provided insight into the school context and how it influenced academic behaviors. The quantitative methods focused on determining whether or not there were significant differences between Black and White students in perceptions of school climate (racial discrimination), academic self-concept and academic motivation. Mixed methods was the most effective method to better understand how multiple factors (school climate, academic self-concept and academic motivation) operate together to influence the differential academic outcomes of Black and White students at this high school.

Research Participants

The quantitative sample included, a total of 110 students (57 males, 52 females) took the survey. 43 students identified as African American (25 male, 17 female), 6 African (3 male, 3 female), 3 Asian or Pacific Islander (2 female, 1 male), 12 Caribbean (7 male, 5 female), 4 Hispanic (3 female, 1 male), 38 White (20 female, 18 male) and 4 identified as other (2 male, 2 female). 58 students reported mostly level 2 or mostly level 2 and 3 (**Lower level**), 52 reported mostly level 4 (**Upper**).

The qualitative research sample included observations of ninth grade Math and English classes. However, the first few weeks I wanted to get a sense of the different types of classroom dynamics, thus I visited several different types of classes. Specifically, I observed classes that were electives and were mixed level classes; these classes were usually 10th, 11th, and 12th grade classrooms. I observed teachers who taught both upper (level 4) and lower level (level 2 and level 3) classes. Although, I observed several ninth grade classes in the beginning of the school term, the majority of the observations were spent in two classrooms.

Mr. Baxter, was a Black male Math teacher who had taught at PHS for over 20 years, was in his late 50's. His classes were very structured with a routine that students followed daily. He had a fun quirky side; for example on the first day I met him he was wearing a Star Trek outfit. Mrs. Hill, taught English. She was a White female and had taught at PHS for almost 10 years. She was very friendly and helpful, although she was a little tentative about me observing her lower level classes. Her classes were not as organized or routine as Mr. Baxter's classes.

On average, there were 20 to 25 students in each class. Mr. Baxter taught three different levels of Math (level 2, 3, and 4). Mrs. Hill taught a lower level (Literacy Strategies and an honors ninth grade English class. Out of the two classrooms that were observed, 22 students were interviewed. Twelve of the interviews were with students in level 3 and 4 classes while 8 of the interviews were with students in level 2 classes. Out of the 22 students, 16 were Black and six were White. (Black students were oversampled in this study, because there was only one White student in the observed lower level classes.) In the lower level, four Black females and five Black males were interviewed.

In the upper level, four Black females, three White females, three Black males, and three White males were interviewed.

Research Procedure

This study consisted of three components: observations, interviews and surveys. I gained entrance to the school by a chance meeting with the Parent Teacher president (PTA). The PTA president provided me with access to both the district superintendent and the school principal. I met with the principal to discuss the research study, specifically why this school was chosen. The principal agreed to allow the study to take place in the high school. She wrote and signed a letter of agreement that was submitted to the Rutgers Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once the research was approved by the Rutgers IRB, the research proposal was sent to the Superintendent and subsequently sent to the school board for approval. The proposal was voted on and approved. The principal sent out an email to all faculty and staff notifying them of my presence in the school and that they should assist me whenever possible. I was given class schedules and was allowed to attend faculty and staff meetings.

Component One: Observations

Component one consisted of school and classroom observations. The goal of the school observations were to describe the overall climate of PHS High School. I observed the general school space, specifically hallways, outdoor areas and the cafeteria. The goal of the classroom observations was to see if there were differences in classroom climate, pedagogy, curriculum and instruction and student teacher interactions among the different “levels.” I also observed student engagement and Black student experiences within the classroom setting. During the first three weeks, I observed a variety of classrooms at all grade levels. The observation of other classrooms and other grade

levels allowed me to gauge developmental and academic differences among the different grade levels.

In the level 2 English class I often assisted the teacher, especially if there was a substitute teacher. However, in the Math class I was a non-participant observer. At the beginning of the semester, each classroom teacher introduced me to the class and gave me an opportunity to discuss the study and answer questions from the students. I used an observation protocol to monitor specific classroom events such as type of pedagogy, curriculum, lecture length, student participation, and student interactions (see observation protocol in appendix B).

I also observed school functions such as the school play, dance recitals, award ceremonies and school field trips. I was also privy to faculty meetings, meetings with outside consultants, and focus groups. In addition, during the observation phase, I had several opportunities to have conversations with teachers, staff and administrators.

Component Two: Interviews

Component two included interviews with Black and White students from all academic levels. The interviews were conducted to answer the question, “In what ways do Black and White students differ in academic self-concept, motivation and perception of school climate.” Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 9th grade students.

Students who were observed in the English and Math classes were recruited to participate in an interview. Students were required to get the parental consent form signed by a parent or guardian. Teachers collected the consent forms; students could also

return consent forms to the main office. I also sent emails to ninth grade parents with information about the research study and a consent form attached.

The interviews were held in an office inside the school library. Students were read the assent form and then asked to sign the assent form if they agreed to participate. Only students whose parents completed a consent form were allowed to participate in the interview. Students were told that it was voluntary and that they could skip any question or stop at any time during the interview. The interviews were semi-structured and designed to feel like a conversation rather than an interview. I wanted the students to feel comfortable and open to discussing a variety of issues. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and coded.

Component Three: Student Survey

Component three of the research design was the quantitative portion. The student survey assessed perceived academic self-concept, perceived school and racial climate and goal orientation. The analysis of the student survey described racial differences as well as differences between lower and upper levels.

With the cooperation of the classroom teacher and administrative staff, students were recruited to take the questionnaire through a pre-written recruitment letter that was read aloud in each class and then sent home with each student. Students were given a parental consent form to take home. Students were required to bring back their signed consent form before they were allowed to take the survey. Students also had to sign an assent form. The survey included 63 questions and was divided into six sub-sections covering academic self-concept, school climate, perceived school discrimination and racial climate, study habits, goal orientation, and background information.

The survey was given at the end of the spring semester. The survey was administered five times in the school library computer lab. Students were given a date and time to take the survey, which was based on their academic schedule. I took measures to ensure that students would not miss valuable classroom instruction. When students arrived at the library during their scheduled time, they were asked to sign in and take a seat at an open computer. The survey was administered via an online survey tool: SurveyMonkey.com. Students were given the link to the survey. The link was written on the Whiteboard in the front of the lab and it was also given to each student individually. I read the assent form aloud and asked the students if they had any questions. The students were reminded that the survey was voluntary and that they could skip questions or stop at any time. The survey took 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

Instruments

Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept was measured with an adapted version of Perceived Competence scale developed by Williams & Deci (1996). This scale had 5 items and measured beliefs about perceived overall academic ability on a five point Likert Scale, *Not at all True to Very True*. Items included: "I feel confident in my ability to learn the material in my classes." Items listed in Appendix C.

School Racial Climate

Perceived discrimination was measured with the School Discrimination Scale (see Eccles, Wong, & Peck, 2006 and Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). This scale had two sections; the Peer Discrimination subscale has three items and the Classroom Discrimination scale had 5 items. Items included: "How often was there racial tension between students of different racial backgrounds?," "How often do you feel that you get

in fights with some kids because of your race?” And questions from the Urban School Climate survey (Perkins, 2005), “students who are not of my race generally do better in school than I do.” Items listed in Appendix C.

School Climate

The Cube Survey of Urban School Climate (Perkins, 2006). The scale had eight items that were measured on a five point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The modified scale measured trust, respect and ethos of caring. Items included, “At my school teachers respect the students”, and “At my school teachers are fair to everyone”.

Motivation

Motivation was measured with the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (Midgley et al, 2000). This scale was divided into three subscales: Performance Approach Goal Orientation, Performance-Avoidance Goal Orientation, and Mastery Approach Goal Orientation. Sample items included: “I like school work that I’ll learn from, even if I make a lot of mistakes; “It’s important to me that the other students in my class think that I am good at my work”.

Study Habits

Participants also completed a modified version of the Study Habits and Attitudes Inventory (Nixon & Frost, 1990) to assess attitudes towards school and coursework. Sample items included: How often do you meet with teachers outside of the classroom?

Demographic Information

Students completed a short demographic questionnaire, reporting their sex, ethnicity, age, grade level, parent’s ethnicity, and “level”. They also reported their parents’ education level and their town of residence.

All instrument items and protocols are listed in the appendix A, B, and C.

Table 1. Research Questions and Methods

Research Question	Method
What is the school climate and culture	Observations/interviews/survey
How is race related to the school ability grouping practices	Observations/interviews
How is student “level” related to academic self-concept and motivation	Observations/interviews/surveys
How do classroom practices and strategies influence academic self-concept and motivation?	Observations/interviews
What are differences between upper level students and lower level students?	Observations/interviews/survey
What are academic and behavioral differences between Black students and White students?	survey
What is the relationship among school climate, academic self-concept and motivation	survey

The observation and interview data was coded for three major priori categories: school climate, academic self-concept (perceptions of ability) and motivation (motivational goals). In each major category, there were several patterns that emerged from the observations and the interviews. Table 2 and 3 represents the patterns that were found and the type of data collected.

Table 2. Qualitative Themes that Emerged from Observations and Interviews

School Climate	Academic Self-Concept	Motivation
Performance Approach	Awareness of level and the attached identity	Extrinsically motivated (i.e. quiz grades)
Classroom management is crucial to climate and culture	Afraid of failure	Students want to be with friends
Status attributed to level/ negative perceptions of Black students	Students were not good at judging their actual academic ability. Student academic Perception (SAP)	Interest and engagement are linked to motivation
Pro leveling/Maintaining rigor and status	Lower level students do not try/ rely on teacher	Classroom structure linked to motivation
Anti-leveling argument		
Emphasis on developing “College going culture”	Developmental issues	Developmental issues: unaware of consequences
Certain parents have a lot of power	Everyone wants to go to college	Very social/ want to be with friends
“middle child complex”	Poor study habits	
Blacks not welcome in AP	Perceived ability is linked to level	
Disconnect between teachers and admin		

Table 3. Data Collection Matrix: Type of Information by Source

Information	Interviews	Observations	Documents	Surveys
School Climate/culture	Yes	Yes		yes
Racial climate	Yes	Yes		Yes
School policies	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Classroom climate	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Student academic self-concept	Yes			yes
Student motivation	Yes			yes
Student engagement		Yes		

Table 4. School Observations and Observation Sites

Teacher meetings	School events	Parent meetings	Main office
Leadership meetings	School play	School board meetings	principal
Discipline committee	Dance recital	NAACP meeting	Asst. Principal
Core Content teacher meetings	Black History Month program		Secretaries and other support staff
9 th grade classrooms			

Findings are presented in the following chapters. In chapter four, the school and community climate is examined: 1) A discussion of the achievement gap between Black and White students; 2) the school's response to the issue; 3) A description of the school

policies and structure; 4) I report my findings on the leveling system and how the environment is connected to academic achievement and the creation of racialized environments.

In chapter 5, the school and classroom climate is explored. I observed meetings and classrooms and interviewed students to identify differences in pedagogy and curriculum of lower level and upper level courses. Several themes emerged from my observations, however, one was particularly salient, classroom management. This chapter will discuss how teachers managed their classrooms and how classroom management was related to student behaviors.

In chapter 6, I reports findings on academic self- concept and motivation. In this chapter, I will discuss the results from classroom observations and interviews with students and teachers. Findings suggest that school policies and classroom practices are related to academic self-concept and academic motivation. Students in the lower level are not provided with opportunities to develop positive academic behaviors.

Chapter 7 discusses the quantitative results of the student survey. The relationships among school climate, academic self-concept and motivation are examined. Findings suggest that the lower level students have a more negative academic self-concept as compared to upper level students and a more negative perception of the school racial climate.

Chapter 8 discusses the racialized environment and ability grouping. How a racialized environment help create and sustain leveling at the high school. Most

importantly, this chapter highlights the negative racial stereotypes of Black students in the district and specifically at PHS.

Personal Perspective and Experiences

As an African American female, I feel passionately about the educational outcomes of Black students in the United States. I have been interested in the topic of the achievement gap or differential academic experiences and outcomes since I was a ninth grade student. I attended a large, diverse high school in the southern region of the United States; although this school was approximately 50% Black and 50% White, the honors and advanced placement classes were majority White students. As a high achieving Black student, I would often be one of two or three Black students in an advanced class and this bothered me. Many of my White classmates were no smarter than my Black classmates. However, year after year the number of Black students in advanced classes continued to decline. During my ninth grade year I explored achievement differences on standardized test and I hypothesized that the test was biased in favor of White students. To measure this hypothesis, I created a test with items modified from the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity (Williams, 1972). Although my thinking on the subject has changed over time and has become much more complex, my early exploration of the topic has influenced my interest in critical race theory and my assumptions that there are imbedded biases in the American education system in favor of White students.

My interest in academic self-concept and motivation has also developed over time. It is also influenced by racial and family background. Throughout high school and college I was extremely motivated and had relatively high academic self-concept, meaning I believed I was smart. I was always well liked by my teachers and provided with plenty of encouragement and positive feedback. Because I believed I was capable, I was very

motivated to continue my success. I was not afraid of challenges because I felt that I would be successful in any venture.

Once I got to graduate school my experiences slowly but surely changed. My academic self-concept took major hits with each passing year; consequently my motivation began to decline. I experienced feelings of isolation and extreme lapses in motivation. This made my graduate school experience drastically different from college and high school. I did not enjoy school, I found it difficult to concentrate and to persist. In order to be successful in graduate school I had to fight through instances of low academic self-concept and change my way of thinking about school and my academic ability.

My experiences with graduate school made me think about my perceptions of my ability and my motivation differently. I began to wonder, what I would be like if I had not been provided with encouragement and positive feedback during high school? What if I did not have the opportunity to take honors and advanced placement classes in high school, would I have been able to persist through college and graduate school? These questions led me to think about what factors contribute to the development of academic self-concept and academic motivation. These questions are what led me to study school climate, academic self-concept and motivation at PHS high school.

Chapter 4: School and Community Descriptions

PHS High School, is a diverse suburban school. In the 2012-13 school year the student population consisted of 51.9% Black students and 38.1% White students. The school vision states that the district “will be the top-performing diverse suburban school district in the nation. PHS is comprised of students from two adjoining towns: Lakewood Township and Sherwood Township. Both towns are diverse middle-class towns. I spent several days in the town centers and neighborhoods. The town centers are full of shops and eateries, with plenty of open space for residents to sit and congregate. On a nice summer day, I enjoyed sitting in Lakewood to watch the people come and go. It is one of those places that make you think “this would be a good movie town”, it is very diverse with all ages and different races and ethnicities perfect for a made- for -TV special.

When you are experiencing the music in the courtyard or just enjoying a drink with friends at one of the many restaurants out-door seating areas, you cannot help but notice the difference in these two towns as compared to surrounding towns. Both Lakewood and Sherwood are surrounded by extreme homogeneous towns. To the east are Black and poor “urban” towns and to the west are wealthy and White “suburban” towns. There are several streets that go through the urban area to the Lakewood and Sherwood.

For example, if you drive down Lakewood Ave, you will drive through urban areas with very narrow streets and no residential housing, mostly commercial buildings where people wait for buses, and the streets are often congested with people double parking because there is little parking for the shops. The streets are so narrow, it’s like driving through a maze. Things suddenly change once you cross into Lakewood, the

streets get wider, and you will see grand homes and gated communities. There are trees and fewer people walking up and down the street. There are no car horns or double parked cars. The commercial buildings are mostly in the town center and if they are not, there is adequate space for parking and the shops are set back from the street.

Driving around the neighborhood you will see an array of housing: large Victorian style homes to charming craftsmen. There is also mixed housing with one family and two family homes in the town as well as apartments. There is a university in Lakewood, thus many college students live in Lakewood and Sherwood. This gives the town a youthful college vibe. The university also creates the need for apartments and apartment style residencies. The area is walkable, many high school students walk to school and because it is an open campus, students can walk home for lunch. You will see students walking around the neighborhoods and hanging out in the town center.

Many residents of both towns found the communities appealing because it is close to New York City, but provided the lifestyle benefits (bigger home, yard and less expensive) of the suburbs. Many residents commute to the city for work. There is a train station conveniently located in the town center that goes directly to the city in about thirty minutes. This is significant because 53.1% of residents in Lakewood and 52.4% of residents in Sherwood are in management professional and related occupations (US Census, 2010).

The geographical location provides an interesting comparison for the communities; these townships are located in E County. E County has a population of approximately 784,000 people and over 20 municipalities. E county is made of high density, high poverty areas as well as suburban and affluent areas. For example of the

variations, one major metropolitan city has a median income of approximately 27,000 dollars while another bordering town has an approximate median income of 150,000 dollars.

I received different reactions from residents, specifically how they perceived their neighborhood. For example, there are residents who have moved from the surrounding urban areas, and they view it as the “promised land”; there is a sense of “we are moving on up.” They like that it is a nice suburban neighborhood. On the other hand, there are residents who compare it to the surrounding wealthier suburbs; these residents suffer from feelings of inferiority, that their neighborhoods and amenities are not as good as other neighborhoods. These feelings also relate to how people view the neighborhood schools with residents who see it as a step up, believing that it is a better school than those who compare it to the wealthier suburbs.

School District Demographics

According to the 2010 United States Census, Lakewood Township has a total population of 16,964. It is 60.4% White residents and 31.3% Black residents. 27.7% of the population are households of married couples with children under 18; 4.7% are single female headed households with children under 18. The median income of families is \$107,641 with 20.8% of household families making \$200,000 or more. Only 2.3% percent of families with children under 18 are under the poverty level according to the 2000 United States Census. However, 9.8% of single female headed households are below the poverty level.

Sherwood Township total population is 23,868; 58.8% White and 32.6% Black. Married couple families with children under 18 make up 32.1% of the population; single

female headed households with children under 18 make up 7.1. 33.7% of families make \$100,000-\$199,000. While 11.6% of families earn 200,000 dollars or more. The median family income is \$92,724. 4.7% of families with children under 18 lived below the poverty level; 17% of single female headed households with children under 18 were below the poverty level.

School District Description

PHS school district is comprised of one high school, two middle schools and six elementary schools that serve over 6,000 students. The high school serves grades nine through twelve, the middle school is grades sixth, seventh, and eighth and the elementary school serve kindergarten through fifth grade. The consolidated district dates as far back to the early 1900's. According to the State Department of Education the district is classified as a District Factor Group "I". Which means it is one of the wealthiest districts in the state. PHS has about 2000 students and is considered a high achieving high school. It received the notable Blue Ribbon award for the 1992-1993 academic school year. The Blue Ribbon award, given by the United States Department of Education, is one of the highest honors an American high school can achieve.

Previous Policy Changes in the PHS District

The district has taken several steps to address and remedy racial inequality in the schools. In 2004 they proposed the abolishment of ability grouping that typically occurred at the end of 5th grade. The district has provided solid evidence for the link between tracking and achievement: in 2007 65% of students in the lower levels failed the HSPA and none of them scored in the advanced proficient range. In level 4, 71% were proficient and 28% were advanced proficient on the HSPA.

In 2008, A task force was created consisting of parents, community members and other stakeholders to examine the leveling policies in the PHS school district. The Leveling Survey: An analysis of Experiences and Attitudes Regarding Leveling in the District, was administered to parents in the district. This survey was administered via telephone to 189 households, which represented 325 middle and high school students. The results of the survey were split down racial lines. When asked if they were satisfied with the current tracking system, a little over 50% of White parents said they were very satisfied, as compared to about 25% of Black parent said they were very dissatisfied. The survey's open ended responses showed many White parents were fearful that their student's performance would suffer if the school was de-tracked.

Survey results showed that Black parents believed that their students were overwhelmingly placed in lower levels as early as the 5th grade level. Survey results also showed that Black parents had more difficulty getting their student's level changed. 78% of Black parents could not change their student's level as compared to 22% of White parents who were not able to change their student's level. Responses to the open ended questions showed that the Black parents, who participated in the survey, believed that the lower levels do not push students to succeed and that many of the Black students were not being challenged in the classroom. Many Black parents also believed that the expectation level for Black students was low.

The Leveling Survey results show that Black parents and students were more dissatisfied with the tracking system than their White counterparts and it took twice as long for Black students to receive a level change after a request compared to White students. These discussions exemplified the paradox of the social capital that White

parents possessed. As Mr. Kline, a White history teacher, expressed when he proclaimed that the school maintains the leveling system to keep White parents happy and White students enrolled, however, this puts the administration in a bind. These parents use their capital and their influence to ensure that their students are advantaged. Teachers and the administration felt “bullied” by the parents yet, they felt pressure to keep these parents happy.

However, this “pressure” was subtle and non-verbal. When Mr. Kline said “race permeates every space of this institution”, this is what he was referring to. In the district is the hidden fear that the school will become a “Black school” as the surrounding urban area schools. This fear is tied to the fear that the school will not be viewed as rigorous or competitive.

In 2010, the superintendent released a report that provided recommendations for equity and excellence in the district. This report was based on the results from the 2009 Task Force on Equity and Excellence committee’s report on the district’s achievement gap. These reports suggested that the districts leveling system was highly correlated to the racial gaps in college enrollment and college degree attainment.

In 2011, the district is administered the PSAT to all students at the high school. The goal was to use the scores to identify students who have the potential to be successful in advanced classes. In addition, the district planned to increase the number of mixed level classes for elective courses and encouraged teachers to use differential instruction in the upcoming academic terms. The goal of multi-level classes is to provide rigor to all students and to make it easier for students to move up in level without having to deal with logistical obstacles.

The district had two programs that they planned to expand in the 2012-2013 academic year. The Step-Up program allows students in level three Math and science classes who receive a B or higher or received a teacher recommendation to participate in the three week Step-Up prep class in the summer, and for that student to take level 4 Physics if he or she successfully completed the three week support class. The district looks to expand this program to English Language Arts courses and the district also proposed to enhance its Bridge to Success program. This program starts the summer of the eighth grade year through the tenth grade. Participants take courses together in the ninth grade and work with a support staff throughout the year. These students are monitored and assessed to determine if they can increase in level.

PHS High School Leveling System

The data reveal that there are three major gaps in the district: the overall gap on standardized test scores, the gap in advance classes, and the gap on postsecondary enrollment and attainment. Many believe that the test scores and college enrollment gap stem from the gap in advanced placement. Research has shown that students who take Advanced Placement courses in high school are better prepared for college (Tinto, 1987). However, PHS has a very strict and rigid guidelines and criteria for AP entrance, thus prohibiting many students from participating in AP courses and creating a disproportionate number of White students in the upper level and Black students in the lower level. In the 2010-2011 school year 74% of White students and only 28% of Black students made up level 4 or above in Language Arts classes. In Math classes 80% of White students are placed in level 4 or above and only 2% White students in the lower level. On the other hand 70% of Blacks are in level 3 or lower, with 31% being in the lowest level. Students in level 4 and 5 of Math are in line to take advanced Math classes

that will prepare them to do well on the SAT as well as give them an advantage when applying for college admission. Although Black students represent 55% of the population in the high school less than 7% are enrolled in advance placement courses.

PHS has up to five levels plus AP, but only three levels in the ninth grade. The leveling system varies according to content area. Below is a chart of the 2012-2013 system. **Table 5** displays descriptions for each level. This chart was presented in the student/parent 2012-2013 handbook.

Table 5. PHS Description of the Ability Grouping System

Levels	Level Description
Level 2	An academic general level for students in need of additional skill development
Level 3	An academic college preparatory level
Level 4	An honors level
Level 5	An advanced honors level designed for students with exceptional academic ability in a particular subject area
Level 6	An advanced Placement level designed for students who are doing college level work in a particular subject area

Table 6. Ninth Grade Content Areas and Level Changes

Subject	2011-2012	2012-2013
English I	Levels 2,3,4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literary Strategies (double period) • Level 2&3 (combined) • Honors
World History	Levels 2,3,4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World History ELL • Literary Strategies • Honors
Biology	Levels 2,3,4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 2&3 (combined) • Honors
Math	Levels 2,3,4,5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 2 • Level 3 • Level 4 (Honors) • Level 5 (Geometry)

According to the PHS handbook, the purpose of academic placement is:

To ensure that all students are provided academic challenges that are commensurate with their abilities and developmental needs. The school has the responsibility to assess the student's academic strengths and needs, and to provide an academic course environment that will encourage and guide academic success

The handbook also describes the placement process:

- Assessment of the student's current academic performance
- Review of available test data about the student
- Assessment of academic requirements of the next course in the sequence
- Teacher judgment regarding the course level that will best meet the
- academic needs of the student

School Climate: College Going Culture, Rigor, and Status

On my official first day, I asked to be given a tour of the school. It took the secretary several hours before she found someone; she told me that she was looking for the “perfect” student. She checked grades and reputation of the student before asking the student to give me a tour. She asked administrators and teachers about the student. She was a soft spoken, White female. Liz was an “AP student” on the special dance team and the fencing team, two of the elite extracurricular activities. My conversation with this student provided insight into the school culture. Liz discussed how she does not have lunch so she can participate in the dance team. From observations of faculty meetings and conversations with school counselors, I learned that many of the upper level students do not have a designated lunch period on their schedule. This allows more room for AP classes. In order to skip lunch, a student must get a parent letter requesting that they replace lunch with an AP course.

From our conversation, it was very apparent that she was aware of “the levels” and that there was stigma attached to lower levels and prestige for being in AP and involved in “elite extra-curricular activities”. This conversation motivated me to explore how academic levels and involvement in activities create student identities. I asked her if she knew anything about the level two classes, she stated, “they do not learn anything in the level 2 Algebra, it’s not as tough as the upper level Math”.

This study attempted to understand how identities around ability are created and those identities sustained through school structures and policies. The “good student”/“bad student” dichotomy was pervasive throughout the school. Bad students often got in trouble. They were those in the lower level, and were perceived as lazy or

indifferent and lacking motivation. Many of the bad students were funneled into level 2 classes because teachers did not believe they could behave in an honors class. Good students were high achieving students, usually AP students or students in the pipeline to AP. They were well liked by teachers. Teachers had high expectations of these students and perceived them as being motivated and capable. These “good” students often were involved in several “elite” activities such as the special dance team or fencing.

One of the next school events I attended was the annual Parents’ Night. The assembly started at 7:00 pm, but by 6:30 pm the auditorium was full. There are lots of parents, mostly White parents but a considerable number of Black parents about 30%. The school declared its goal of creating and maintaining a college going culture at the annual Parents’ Night. The school had a mission to foster and maintain a “college going culture”. This phrase, “college going culture” was the topic of the principal’s address on parents’ night. A major component of the “college going culture” is creating rigor and aligning all courses with the Common Core Curriculum standards. The district defines rigorous as “robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people will need for success in college and careers” (Student handbook, 2012-2013).

The principal described the variety of rigorous courses available to all students and more opportunity to take advanced placement (AP) classes. She also discussed and described the Advanced Placement Forum which was a school wide initiative to provide information to all students about AP and the pipeline to AP. However, I later found out that this forum was not held during school hours and was not mandatory for students to attend. Wide dissemination of this even was not made a priority, nor was it offered at an

accessible time. An announcement was given during the daily announcements on the student-produced newscast.

Another parents' meeting, Junior Night, was also well attended. The agenda of this meeting was to discuss preparation for college, how to complete the online system for applying to colleges, how to access transcripts and how to get recommendation letters sent to the appropriate schools. The guidance counselors discussed what makes a "good candidate," things like extra -curricular activities and being well rounded. The guidance office presented a well-received skit on being a good, well-rounded student. Overall, there was considerable emphasis on grade point average, as well as heavy emphasis on the importance of the 11th grade to a "college-going" student.

PHS offered a considerable number of AP classes offered each year at the school. However, upon further observation, it was noted that the AP classes also contribute to the status hierarchy at the school. Participation in AP courses not only supports the "college going culture", it is also an academic area that the school does very well especially in comparison to other schools in the state. According to the State Performance report, compared to other schools in the state, this school is rated as having Very High College and Career Readiness (this is measured by students' participation in rigorous courses such as AP or IB and college entrance exams) as compared to other schools across the state and to its peers. In fact, this school scores in the 86th percentile on College and Career Readiness measures based on the number of students "demonstrating behaviors that are indicative of future attendance and/or success in college".

Peer schools are schools with similar demographics such as percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch. However, it is rated low/ "significantly lags" on

Graduation and Post-secondary Education, which is a measure of the number of students graduating in four years and number of students who fail to complete college as compared to schools across the state. PHS was rated as average on Academic Achievement as compared to other schools across the state. Academic achievement is measured by proficiency scores on the New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). Unfortunately, the school is not doing well on measures of academic achievement and this is likely due to the fact that many (is it the majority of students?) of the school's students do not have access to high level or advanced courses. In addition, it is only the students in the AP courses at PHS whom receive the type of rigorous coursework that would provide them with the tools needed to be successful in college.

Undeniably, there is a segment of the school population that embodies the rigorous "college- going" identity. The school offers several advanced placement (AP) courses. The emphasis on Advanced Placement is very apparent at the school. Many students take full advantage of the variety of AP courses offered, as previously mentioned, some students opt to skip a lunch period in order to fit an AP or an elite extracurricular activity in their schedule. In a faculty meeting, a presentation was given about student stress and how it manifests itself in a student's life.

Teachers were concerned that many of their "high achieving" students were under too much pressure to take as many AP classes as their schedule would permit. Not only were these high achieving students under pressure to take several AP's they also were expected to get A's or B's in every class. Some faculty believed that parents' were placing too much pressure on students to take many AP classes and to perform well in all of their classes. One teacher shared an anecdote about a student who had five AP classes

and he got a C in one of the classes, so his parents made him quit an extracurricular activity that he loved. During this discussion, it was argued that students should not be allowed to skip their lunch period. This is one of the areas where parents over ride school policy. If a parent demands that their child take an AP that is offered during the lunch period, the school often acquiesces. The head counselors adamantly stated, *“We need to stop letting parents bully the administration”*.

I interviewed several high achieving upper level students and they discussed the pressures around high academic performance. Sean, an upper level White male commented, *“I already know which AP classes I will take every year until I graduate. My brother went to Duke and my parents expect me to go to a top school too”*. Another high achieving student said, *“yea, basically I know I will have to skip lunch my senior year, most of the AP kids do it. My friend who is a junior said, that you just eat lunch in class at your desk, my parents will be ok with it as long as I am doing my best in all my classes”*. Many of the upper level, high achieving students expressed concerns of being accepted into top competitive colleges in universities once they graduated. Sean also stated, that he thinks that schools in the surrounding suburbs are better and more competitive than PHS.

The “college going culture” infiltrates all aspects of school life, regardless of level. The majority of students reported wanting to go to college and plan on attending when they graduate high school approximately, 80% of students surveyed reported that they planned on attending college once they graduated from high school. In lower level classes there were often discussions about “preparing for college.” Teachers in this level attempt to motivate students by saying “you’ll need to know how to do this in college”.

Although the administration repeatedly commented that all students were receiving a rigorous education that would prepare them to be successful in college, the curriculum at the lower level barely provided students with the basics needed to function in society. Students in these classes often complete worksheets, many students have difficulty comprehending or thinking critically. Often the teacher would read to them instead of allowing them to read and interpret the text on their own.

On several occasions, I worked with one particular student who was not reading or comprehending on grade level. As long as I sat next to him, he would do his work. Unfortunately, he had an extremely difficult time comprehending the vocabulary and understanding the text. Although he was in the literary strategies course, there were not many opportunities for him to work on reading comprehension or learning strategies. On several occasions, I observed the teacher giving him the answer or doing the work for him. I could tell that students in the class were frustrated and this frustrated me. It was very exasperating to know that several students needed more support but they were not receiving it due to the large class sizes.

One morning as I sat in the main office, I noticed the principal was very upset. Apparently, there was an incident that had occurred at the morning assembly; five boys were misbehaving in the senior assembly and the principal asked them to stop, they did not so she ordered them to go to the office. Three of the boys refused to go. They blatantly disregarded her request. She was furious as she exclaimed, "*They were absolutely insolent.*" She had a security guard get them and escort them to the office. While they were in the office, a teacher came in, she had credulous look on her face as he

tried to defend them. She kept repeating, “Those are two of my AP boys”. It seemed that she could not believe that an “AP” student could ever be found guilty of any wrongdoing

The fact that they were in AP gave them more credibility or a “pass” in the eyes of the teacher. The principal was not impressed she says, *“I don’t care who they are”* and they were given Saturday detention. The principal mentions that some teachers and staff make exceptions for “AP” students. Students were treated differently based on their “level” and their race. These boys disregarded the principal and teachers came to their defense, because they believed that they were “good” boys. Being in advanced levels gave students status and this status was used as a negotiating tool. They were able to negotiate their way out of disciplinary actions and their poor behavior was often excused. When White students and upper level students misbehaved it was excusable. . Several of my upper level students told me that have not received punishment for infractions that some lower level students are punished for. Kelly, an upper level female told me that she often is caught on her cell phone in the hallway and she has been late to school several times but she has never received detention.

Todd an upper level explained, *“I think the upper level kids do have an advantage, we get cut slack when we mess up.”* Mrs. Cox also believed that upper level students and some White students were not disciplined the same as lower level Black students, *“I have seen teachers end out a Black student for being insolent and a White student will do the same thing in the next moment and nothing happens.”* On another visit, as I am sitting in the main office I notice a female student crying, apparently she was coordinating a walk out to protest the dress code. She believes it was a sexist policy. However, now she is worried about being suspended. The school found out about it and

stopped it. One of the Black assistant principals felt that the administration was coddling her and that she would not be suspended, she felt that if this was a Black student she would be suspended. Several teachers came in to the office to sit with her and tell her it would be okay. When she goes to speak with the principal another teacher is allowed to go in with her. Many teachers and students felt that she was receiving preferential treatment because she was a White female.

I was told that many White students do not receive disciplinary actions and if they do, more than likely they are able to avoid any punishment or suffering any negative consequences. Research has shown that Black students experience disciplinary actions including suspension and expulsion, according to a national representative sample in 2003, 1 in 5 Black students were suspended compared to less than 1 in 10 White students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). At PHS, 82.5% of out of school suspensions were Black students. Mr. Kline told me that not many White students receive detention and if they get detention, they often do not attend Saturday detention, even when it is mandatory. Their parents are able to negotiate their punishment, which is often “forgiven”. However, Black parents as well as Black students do not receive this same treatment. A Black teacher Ms. Brown confided, *“I don’t know if it’s because they do not know that they can fight a disciplinary action or if the administration just doesn’t give Black kids the same treatment as White students, but Saturday detention is all Black...I want to tell them [Black students] to just stop coming”*.

Detention is a serious consequence because it can cost students their privileges such as dances and extra-curricular activities. One particular incident during Saturday detention caused an uproar throughout the school. A Black male student was about five

minutes late to detention, and the teacher on duty refused to let him in to the school. This was significant because if he did not attend this Saturday, he would have more detention days added to his punishment and he would not be able to attend the upcoming school activities. This student lived on the outer boundaries of the district and he had to walk to school. He pleaded with the teacher to let him in, but she would not budge. The student refused to leave the campus. The teacher called the city police and four police cars arrived on the scene.

Many in the community were outraged; they could not believe that police were called to the campus for such a trivial incident. Several teachers commented that this incident was just one example of the differential treatment of Black and White students at the school. A very upset teacher commented, *"If that was one of these White boys, the teacher would have never denied him entrance and there is no way in hell she would have called the police."* Another teacher commented, *"I do not understand why she would call the police...they are afraid of our children"*. The differential treatment was not lost on the students. Several of the students I interviewed discussed the differential discipline of students.

There's this kid in my class who walks in late like every day, who is...darker

Me: A Black student?

yea...and so my teacher will like yell at him, but if someone else walks in late, it's like whatever, but like he could like have a reason or she could say do you have a pass? It like pisses me off when teachers do this, I mean we are all the same (Upper level 4 White female)

I have friends who are like this teacher, just doesn't like me, or like I've heard stories of a teacher sending a student out for something that someone else did the same thing, but they didn't get like the same punishment. I guess it just depends on the teachers... Now since its getting warm a lot of the girls like the AA girls feel that they are targeted more for the shorts that they are wearing, a Caucasian

girl can wear shorts like the same length and they do get in trouble sometimes, but not as much as the African American girls (Upper level Black female)

We do something bad and we get in the most trouble, they don't get in the same trouble, if they even go to the office they come right back, we get suspended, or like they may get detention but we get suspended. Also the dress code, they go after the Black, they don't go after Caucasian, I have seen girls who are basically naked, with underwear and nobody says nothing to her, but a Black girl will get sent home without even a warning (Lower level Hispanic female)

During the Black history month assembly, several students discussed their experiences with racism. Many of the students commented on experiencing racism or discrimination at school. One story in particular was quite interesting. A White male told of a time in a class where the teacher suspected a student of having drugs; however, she did not know which students. She only smelled the odor, but she did not have any other evidence, so she called security. The security officer, a Black male, came to the class and immediately pulled out one of the Black male students and the officer continued to pull out Black male students one after the next. While all along, a White male student was the one with the drugs and no one ever suspected or searched him.

When I asked students to “*describe the level of trust and respect at your school,*” I received some very thought-provoking answers. The upper level students seemed to be more perceptive of how teachers treated students and how student level and status contributes to how students are treated. The upper level students reported that in their classrooms teachers and students displayed a mutual respect for one another. However, they were not sure if lower classes were the same,

I think it depends on what class you are in...My classes are pretty respectful, but I don't know if it is like that across the board (upper level Black female).

It also depends on if the teacher likes you, or if you are nice to the teacher, in my Math class the teacher attacks this one boy, maybe because he doesn't do the work (upper level White female)

Other components of school climate are expectations of students and the fair treatment of students. Similar to the perceived level of trust at the school, the upper level students were very aware of differential treatment and expectations based on ability level and status. A lower level mixed Black female had this to say about the level of expectation at the school, *“they think level two students are slower”* (Kim, lower level Black female). Todd, an upper level White male believed that teachers’ had higher expectations for upper level students, *“My biology teacher is always telling my class that he expects us to do better than the lower level class”*. Keisha an upper level mixed female did not believe all students were treated fairly,

Actually, I don’t think all students are treated fairly. I know in some instances they will like give us harder work or they will grade it harder and they will say I expect lower performance from my other kids, but you are my honors class, they have actually said those things before; so I think they actually do have different expectations whether they mean to or not.”

Several of the upper level boys mentioned that student teacher interaction depends on the student and student behavior. The upper level students understood the dynamics of dealing with authority figures. The interviews suggested that upper level students, especially the White males understood that how they are perceived by their teachers could influence their grade and their relationship with the teacher. Sean an upper level White male commented, *“Teachers react to kid’s attitude in class and take it personally and they can be unfair”* (upper level White male) *“I think it depends on the kid, if the kid is like disrespectful, I think the teacher is going to grade harder.”* Level 4 students such as Sean understood the “culture of power.” specifically rules of the classroom and how to interact with authority figures.

Summary

PHS is a diverse high school nestled in middle class suburban town with high median income for all residents (Black residents have a median income of 80,000). Additionally, 50% of the community's tax dollars are allocated to the schools. The district has been considered one of the best in the state, with the high school being named a Blue Ribbon school in 1993. However, in recent years the district's scores on standardized test have lagged behind comparable districts. Furthermore, the district has identified racial gaps on state proficiency exams, advanced placement courses, and college completion. Many parents and teachers in the district believe that the leveling system one cause of the racial gaps.

The district has developed several plans and programs to address the racial academic gaps. One plan is to start de-leveling at the high school. Although the school has not completely de-leveled, it decreased levels in many of the content areas in ninth grade. The ninth grade is a crucial year in the high school. However, the ninth grade has the most leveled classes because they do not take as many electives as upperclassmen. This study is looking at ninth lower level and upper level classes to see how students are grouped and, if all students are being prepared to take AP and advanced level classes.

Chapter 5: Classroom Matters, a Tale of Two Classes: The Influence of Classroom Management on Classroom Climate and Student Engagement

As I sat in the back of the classroom, I looked around in amazement and thought, “this cannot be a classroom in this academic high school.” It was complete chaos, I thought I was sitting in a movie set, think “Lean on Me” or “Stand and Deliver.” It was so loud. Students were cursing and dancing around. No one even cared that I was in the room, maybe they were acting out because I was in the room, maybe they did not even realize that I was in the room. (Joyvin, the researcher, on first day of observing Mrs. Hill’s class)

Eventually, an adult came into the class, I introduced myself and told her who I was and what I was doing. The principal had sent out an email to all teachers notifying them that I was doing a case study on the school and would be collecting my data during the school year, so she was not completely caught off guard by my presence. This teacher, Mrs. Jackson, was the co-teacher. She was there to assist students with IEP’s. Mrs. Jackson was not very hands on. On the first day she ignored the students cursing and going in and out of the classroom. She looked exasperated as if she believed that if she ignored bad behavior it would go away. The substitute took the “good kids” to the library, so Mrs. Jackson was left with the more rowdy students.

The primary teacher, Mrs. Hill, was out sick and I believed this was why the students were rambunctious that day. I assumed that when she returned the class would be much calmer. Unfortunately, as time went on and I continued to observe this classroom I realized that this was common practice. My initial observations spurred several research questions. Initially, I was asking if there were differences between upper level classes and lower level classes. I was interested in differences in engagement and academic self-concept as well as differences in instruction, pedagogy and curriculum. After the observations of this level 2 classes I had several new questions:

- What are positive student behaviors?
- What factors contribute to positive student behavior?
- How is teacher behavior related to positive student behavior?
- What are classroom management strategies that encourage positive student behavior?
- Does student behavior vary with teacher classroom management?

I observed several classes during the 2012-2013 academic year. In the beginning of the year I observed a variety of classes and levels in different content areas. However, the focus of the study was ninth grade Math and English classes. Thus, I selected one Math teacher and one English teacher and observed their upper and lower level classes. Mrs. Hill, the English teacher had two lower level classes and two upper level classes. Mr. Baxter, the Math teacher had multiple levels: level 2, 3, and 4. I visited each classroom two to three times a week.

Classroom Management

Managing a classroom can be a rather daunting experience. It's not easy interacting and directing a classroom full of energetic students. Teachers have the task of keeping students engaged and interested but also maintain structure and order in the classroom. A student's classroom experience can influence how he or she perceives his or her education experience as well as his or her academic ability (Tyson, 2011).

Teacher management of the classroom influences classroom climate and consequently student behavior and achievement. A teacher must have control of the classroom, because if the teacher does not have control of the classroom, students will not respect him or her. Consequently, if students, especially the lower level students, do not

respect the teacher, they misbehave in class. Upon observing several classes, I noticed a few classes that were out of control. One class in particular, Mrs. Hill lower level class, was very rowdy. They are copying each other's work, but no one is really doing anything. At one point, toward the end of class, the teacher looks completely frustrated she says, *"You guys have to gain some control."*

Conversely, I observed classrooms with students that were well behaved and actively engaged in learning. Students in these classrooms were asking and answering questions. They were working effectively in groups and independently. The students were respectful of the teacher and each other. Observations and interviews showed that there are factors that increase student behavior and motivation. In well-managed classrooms teachers engaged in several behaviors to maintain student engagement and manage the classroom. When teachers exhibited consistent behaviors in the classroom, such as consistency in rules and classroom policies, high expectations of all students, and engaging classroom curriculum and pedagogy student behavior and achievement increased. Additionally, when lower level classes were well managed student's exhibited more positive academic behaviors.

In the well-managed classroom, the teacher had a structure that was consistent from day-to-day. Students came into the class and they knew what to expect. For example, Mr. Baxter taught multiple levels (2-4) and I could not tell the difference in the levels based on behavior. On the other hand, in poorly-managed classrooms, the students would spend the first ten to fifteen minutes in the beginning of every class just walking around and talking to each other. Some days the class was in complete chaos. It was extremely loud with lots of cursing. Students were doing everything except what they were supposed to do: dancing

in front of the mirror, sleeping, playing cards, holding irrelevant conversations, charging phones, throwing stuff across the room, listening to music with headphones.

Teachers, who were not good “managers”, would experience drastic differences in student behavior for lower level classes and upper level classes. For example, Mrs. Hill’s, upper level classes were much calmer and better behaved than her lower level classes. Although her upper level class was not as organized as Mr. Baxter’s classes, it was a much better behaved class as compared to her lower level class. As I began to notice significant differences in Mr. Baxter’s classes and Mrs. Hill’s classes, I observed other Math and English classes to understand what factors were contributing to the differences. My observations showed that classroom rules and policies, teacher behavior and expectations as well as student engagement were factors that contributed to classroom climate.

Consistency in Rules and Classroom Policies

Classroom observation showed that demanding and responsive interactions between the teacher and students are keys to a well-managed classroom. The teacher should demand positive behavior and be responsive to student needs and student behavior. When teachers demand positive behavior, he or she sets rules and policies that regulate student behavior. In well-managed classrooms, the teachers are consistent with their demands and they follow through with their disciplinary policies. For example, in Mr. Baxter’s classroom the classroom policy was that if a student was playing with their phone during classroom instruction, the phone was confiscated. He took several phones in the beginning of the semester and a parent had to come in to pick it up after the first few incidents in the beginning of the school year, he did not have any more problems with cell phones being used in the classroom. Another management technique was calling

a parent to report disruptive behavior. Teachers with well-managed classrooms did not hesitate to inform parents when a student was misbehaving. Mr. Baxter told me that he called parents at the beginning of each semester for all students struggling academically or having behavior problems. If students did not improve he requested in-person meetings with the student's parents. He said for some of his more challenging students, he had to call parents more often.

On the other hand, some believe that calling parents does not work, but I found that this belief was based on an assumption that parents did not care and that they would not respond. I asked Mrs. Hill if she had met with the parents of her most difficult student, Derek. She said, *"No, I mean... I think his mother is like on drugs or something and has like two jobs."* I asked her if she knew that for sure, and she said *"not exactly."* These "facts" were **assumed**, because she had never spoken with the parents. Thus, she did not know what their situation or background entailed. Her assumptions about the families of her students greatly hindered her ability to manage her classroom. Mr. Baxter called communicated with parents on a regular basis, and he was able to decrease instances of misbehavior in his classrooms. He told me, *"it was not easy, it's a lot of work and some parents are not responsive but many of them are."*

Consistent rules and regulations meant that teachers had to have clear classroom policies and clear expectations. Teachers who had a structured routine were more successful at maintaining consistency. When teachers are consistent, they cannot fall victim to the "empty threat" practice. This is when a teacher says he or she will take action if the behavior continues, but they do not follow through on their "threat." In the poorly-managed classroom, I noticed that the teacher would often tell a student that she

was going to him out of the classroom and to the dean's office for misbehaving. Each grade level had a dean, and the dean handled all disciplinary issue. This student often would say inappropriate things and constantly harass other students in the class. She would say repeatedly that she was going to send the student to the dean's office, but she never did. The student would continue to misbehave and the teacher would continue to say "I'm going to send you to the dean," this was a never-ending cycle of misbehavior and empty threats.

Most students I interviewed, regardless of their level, wanted to be in a well-managed classroom that was conducive to learning. A lower level student discussed her favorite class, *"science is my favorite class because it is not out of control, if there is a problem she will stop and talk to us and calm us down she doesn't just give up, it makes us feel like she care about how we act."* Other lower level students also commented on their learning environment. There was a consensus that students wanted their teachers to manage the classroom and students wanted to know that the teacher was in "control." A lower level female student complained about her learning environment, *"like the people in my class, they come late they keep talking, I can't get nothing done, they get off track talking about a fight or what happened the day before and the teacher doesn't really do anything about it"*. Lower level students' believed that their teachers do not enforce rules or care about their behavior, *"I think the upper levels are different, you know the teacher and the way the rules are, they may be more uptight."* Uptight, meaning that the teacher enforces the rules compared to the other teachers.

I asked a lower level student, Denton, about his English class and why he thought the class was out of control. He had this to say, *"They don't care, some teachers don't*

care what students do. Most of my classes the teacher allows kids to do whatever. This is one reason why students fail, students do something bad and the teacher doesn't care." I then asked him what he thought the teacher should teacher do?" He said; *"make them switch seats, I don't know, but say something!"* This statement supports the finding that students want teachers to exert authority and discipline. When teachers discipline their students (in a fair manner), students connect that to caring and being responsive. This idea of just "saying something" became more salient as I observed more classes. I often noticed students being very disruptive, making inappropriate statements and being disrespectful to the teacher and their classmate, but the teacher never intervened or demanded that the student stop.

In one class, in particular, Derek a lower level male, cursed excessively and harassed the girls, and I was appalled that the teacher never said anything or reprimanded him. I was often amazed that teachers did not respond to negative behavior. I sat in one class and observed a male student prop his feet on the desk in front of him, put his hat over his face; throw his books on the ground and sleep. It took the teacher 30 minutes before she even said anything to him. Several teachers believed that if they ignored the behavior the student would eventually stop.

The observations of several classes revealed that one difference between well-managed classrooms and poorly-managed classrooms was that students respected the teacher's authority. Students will not respect the teacher's authority, if the teacher does not follow through on discipline. If the teacher tells a student, he or she will send them to the dean if they do not correct their behavior, but do not even, when the student continues to misbehaves, students will not respect his or her authority.

A teacher's behavior also played a significant role in classroom management. How a teacher reacts and responds to students' influences the classroom climate. Teachers' who are not easily flustered or who are able to respond rationally to negative behavior are most successful at managing a classroom. When I asked a level 2 student why he thought students misbehave in some classes and not others; he said, *"because how the teacher reacts sometime... 'the kids think it's funny" "Her reaction makes the students to act out more."* "She gets so upset and I also asked this student which class do students misbehaved the least. He identified Mr. Baxter's class, a class that I labeled as a "well-managed" classroom.

When I asked Mr. Baxter why he thought this class had less misbehavior from students as compared to other lower level classrooms, he said, *"He gets serious, but he is actually a nice teacher, he really cares about his students."* Another lower level student reported *"Students remember how a teacher treats them and also the way the teacher respects them and helps them out, students remember that the next time they are in class".* A White female upper level student, Kelly, also had similar feeling about teacher behavior, *"the teacher should not make the student feel so low, and that's why some of them are rude."* This student believed that teachers were more respectful towards their level 4 students and she has seen teachers treat a level 2 student much more negatively than a level 4 student, *"I think teachers are friendlier in their level 4 classes."*

One day I was observing Mr. Baxter's well-managed classroom. Two students were having an inappropriate conversation, and one of them yelled "you suck". Mr. Baxter did not hesitate to ask the student to step outside of the classroom. Outside of the classroom, he told the student that he would not tolerate outburst or inappropriate language. I found

this exchange quite interesting, because I had heard Derek using very profane language in Mrs. Hill's class many times, and she never addressed his behavior.

When the teacher had no control of the classroom, students would not respect his or her authority. Anything could set the students off. For example, one day the teacher threw a water bottle into the trash after she repeatedly told a student to put it away. The class erupted in an uproar of *"that's wrong," "you are disrespectful;"* the student kept yelling, *"You can't touch my property, my mom paid good money for this"*. In actuality, the bottle only cost 50-cents and the student could not care less about a 50-cent water bottle; however, she knew she could upset the teacher and create a major disturbance. The teacher was visibly flustered. Then she started apologizing; the more she apologized and attempted to appease them, the more disruptive they became. When a teacher is constantly pleading with the students...constantly, saying, "pay attention", "do your work", "sit down," but not following through with discipline or consequences for disruptive behavior, students did not take the teacher seriously.

I asked a student in this class why students did not seem to respond to Mrs. Hill's request. A student responded, *"Umm, I don't think they really respect her and she never does anything."* Occasionally, in the lower level class there was one student that exhibits more disruptive behaviors than the other students and often urges the other students to act out. In Mrs. Hill's class, this student was Derek. I observed him being disruptive on several occasions; he would often engage other students in irrelevant conversations or he would walk around the class or talk out of turn. The teacher would get very frustrated with his behavior, and her frustration would become apparent. At one point she exclaimed, *"Why doesn't anyone care?"* This reaction created a cycle of the students being disruptive and

the teacher responding in frustration which caused more disruption. The teacher behavior was the catalyst for more students becoming disruptive.

As a student mentioned, some student got “kicks” out of frustrating the teacher. This trend was not relegated to just the lower level; I also observed this in the upper level classes that were poorly-managed. In Mrs. Hill’s Honors classroom, the students might ask a very difficult question that they knew the teacher did not have the answer to, or make sarcastic comments under their breath. One upper level male student said, *“Well, this is like my worst class, it’s so boring and we don’t think she knows what she is doing, so it’s fun to trip her up.”*

Conversely, during another observation in the well-managed class, I noticed that the class is getting off task. He was giving a review for an upcoming quiz however, the students were not paying attention to the review. He slightly raised his voice and said *“I’m not the one taking the quiz tomorrow I’m not doing this for my health.”* They quieted down and started answering questions. However, a few moments later they lost focus again so he stopped the review. The students were very upset and Denton pleaded with him to continue the review, because the quiz was worth several points. He does not give in to their request and he refused to argue with them. He went on to say, *“Starting Monday, assigned seats”*. Consequently, the next time he gave a review, the students were focused and attentive.

Mr. Baxter used a strategy that I noticed was utilized in several well-managed classes: assigned seating. He did not hesitate to enforce assigned seating, but he gave them the opportunity to select their own seats in the beginning of the semester and if became disruptive, he would go back to the seating chart. This strategy allowed students

to have the autonomy to select their seats, but it could also be used as a disciplinary action. Students were responsible for their actions because they knew there were consequences. If students were not positively engaged in the classroom instruction, this freedom was revoked. In several poorly-managed classrooms, I observed students who were not engaged in the instruction because they were often involved in other activities such as discussions with a classmate or “flirting” with a classmate.

In Mrs. Hill’s classroom, several students often engaged in conversations that were not relevant to the academic lesson. In this class, Rashad and Jessica would continuously converse and flirt with each other through the entire class. Neither one could focus on the lesson because they were focused on their interaction with each other. I observed several of these classes and this pair would often talk to each other the entire class; not only did this impede their learning, it became disruptive to other students. It took several classes before the teacher finally moved Rashad to the front of the classroom. This one change made a significant difference in the class. When the pair separated, the class settled down and the teacher was able to get through the lesson without much interruption.

In another poorly-managed classroom, it would take students at least 15 minutes before they would get to their seats and settle down. Towards the end of the semester, the teacher decided to enforce a seating chart. The next class, it took students only 5 minutes to settle down, and the following classes most of them got to their seats immediately. The seating chart also allowed the teacher to seat students strategically. A seating chart is an opportunity to separate students that often talk to each other during class. Some students are catalyst for other students. For example, in the Math class I observed two

male students who talked and played throughout the class. One student would start being disruptive and then the other would soon follow his behavior. However, when the students were separated, both students' behavior improved drastically. Additionally, students who are struggling could be placed near students who were stronger academically. In one class, I observed a girl who often acted in class and were struggling with her classwork, when the teacher moved her to the front of the class with the more engaged students, she slowly started following their example. She became more engaged and worked harder in class.

Denton, a lower level Black male said, "Teachers cannot take things personally." When a teacher becomes noticeably frustrated or upset, students perceive it as the teacher taking it as a personal attack. An upper level student commented, *"Teachers' react to kids attitude in class and take it personal and not be fair."* When students sensed the teacher was at the "breaking" point, the students would often verbally gang up on the teacher. A lower level student described it, *"I think it starts with one and then gets out of control, it's like dogs one barks and the whole house barks"*. For example, when Mrs. Hill asked a female student to move to a different seat, the student refused. Other students backed her up and started yelling at Mrs. Hill, *"You know damn well she always sits there"*. The teacher attempted to negotiate and plead with the student, but she would not budge. Eventually the teacher gave up and the student remained in her seat. She constantly threatened to send them to the Dean but she never did. The students did not respect her authority.

Observations showed that some teachers had a difficult time managing their classroom; however, classroom management was also linked to classroom size,

specifically for the lower level. In a lower level Math class there were over 23 students; the teacher complained that there were too many students in this class, especially since many of them needed extra support. The administration told the teacher that although they agreed that there were too many students in this lower level class, they could not do anything about it because there were “scheduling issues”. Thus, they could not move students around to make the class smaller and more manageable. Observations revealed that many of the lower level classes were large. Many level 2 teachers appeared overwhelmed, even when they had a co-teacher in the class.

Teacher Perceptions and Expectations

In the beginning of the school year, I arrived at each class early to speak with the teacher and I asked for their permission to observe their classroom. It never failed, if I was asking to observe a lower level class, the teacher would hesitate, then he or she would say, *“are you sure you want to observe this class... it’s a level 2.”* I would tell him or her that *“yes, I want to observe level 2, but I also want to observe your honors class.”* Then the teacher would comment with great apprehension, *“I have to warn you, this class is different [from honors]”*. During the observations, several level 2 teachers appeared very uncomfortable. I always felt compelled to speak to them after the class to assure them that I was not “evaluating” them.

After several observations of large level 2 classes, I realized that many students in level 2 could be “leveled up” if leveling was based on ability. However, many of the students in level 2 were there because of behavioral issues. If only the students in level 2 were the students who needed additional supports and students who were classified as Spec Ed, the Level 2 classes would be much smaller.

There was a consensus among teachers that advanced level students were the standard to which all students should aspire. On several occasions, I witnessed teachers making statements to level 2 students that would suggest that the students were nonstandard. Towards the end of one ninth-grade Math class the teacher, in a very strained tone, commented, “Are we ready to listen like normal students?” I could tell that the teacher was feeling irritated and overwhelmed; however, I wondered if she really felt that these students were abnormal. In the same vein, I heard teachers tell their lower level class that they were not “acting like real students”. On another occasion, a teacher commented to her class, “my expectations are that you will act like a student”.

On the other hand, teachers often would use lower level students as an example of how not to act or bad behavior. I overheard one teacher telling her honors class, “I expect this type of behavior from my level 2 but not from this class”. Interestingly, I observed honors classes that were just as rowdy or chatty as a level 2 class. However, they were never referred to as “*abnormal*”. Many times a teacher would make an excuse for their behavior, “*It’s the last period of the day*” or “*They have had a rough week*”.

Teachers expectations of students influences management of the classroom and consequently student behavior in a poorly-managed classroom, the teacher said the students lacked “*impulse control*” and they are just “*not there developmentally*”. On the other hand, in the well-managed classroom the teacher **expected** his students to behave in class, regardless of their level. He did not assume that the parents did not have time or did not want to talk about their student’s behavior. Mr. Baxter, admitted it took time and hard work on his behalf to get his level 2 class to look like his level 4,

Many students in level 2 are used to teachers who don't care how they act in class and don't expect much of them academically or behaviorally. I had to try several strategies. I am in constant contact with parents and most importantly, the students know what I expect from them and that I will not accept anything less.

Students also saw the connection between teacher expectations and student level. A level

2 Black male commented,

I think level 2 classes give you a lot of breaks, they don't think that we can do more work they have a lot more class time and in like the high levels they have a lot of work and like high expectations. So like they learn more and they get more test and quizzes. We just have like, I wouldn't say easier, but less hard, and like umm I'm not really sure, because I never actually seen the difference [he has never been in a level 4 class].

The Nature of Behavior

Behavior is subjective. "Good" or "bad" behavior is in the eye of the beholder. The teachers defined what acceptable behavior was and what was not. Behavior was often related to how a student was perceived. A student's behavior could determine if the student was considered a smart, capable student, or not. For instance, much of the apprehension surrounding students being placed in higher levels was on the perception that their behavior was not suited for level 4. As I sat in on a faculty meeting, I noticed that several teachers were skeptical of leveling up students, and this was largely due to the belief that level 2 students would not behave properly. In one meeting a counselor said, "*Many of our level 2 students are not socially prepared for a level 4*". At the school board meetings on "leveling," many parents expressed a concern that the behavior of level 2 students would be a great disruption in a level 4 class. This was not only the belief of faculty, parents and many students held this belief.

Several teachers told me that some students were placed in level 2 based on their behavior. Often this behavior was excused or expected based on attributions placed on a

students. For example, as I mentioned previously, one teacher commented that her students could not help the way they behaved because they lacked “impulse control”. Teachers and students often held a belief that the lower level students lacked the proper support at home to foster “good” behavior. One teacher said, *“It’s the home life, a lot of these kids are caregivers for siblings, their parents are working two or three jobs and they just can’t provide that support”*. Similarly, a White level 4 student said, *“It goes back to how you are raised at home. If your parents are working like three shifts and then they don’t have someone at their house so their freedom level rises and of course they have no discipline because no one is there.”*

I found this commentary quite intriguing especially since much of the information I received about wild house parties, or kids drinking and doing drugs on the weekends were centered on White students. Nevertheless, there was a pervasive belief that Black students, specifically lower level students, were lacking positive and/or structured behavioral supports at home. Furthermore, many of the Black households were two parent households. Many of the Black parents held professional or graduate degrees and had high incomes.

Behavior was perceived differently, based on the class, specifically level designation. I observed similar types of behavior in different levels that were perceived completely differently. An upper level, English class was loud; there were a lot of peer conversations, students were moving around the classroom and at times interrupting the teacher by speaking out of turn or calling out an answer. These behaviors exhibited by a level 4 class were not considered negative, teachers believed this was “normal teenage behavior”. On the other hand, in the level 2 class, when these behaviors were exhibited,

the teacher would make statements that referred to their behavior as abnormal or due to personal flaws in their character, for instance, when the teacher yelled at her students to act like “normal” students when they were being overly chatty.

Curriculum, Pedagogy and Student Engagement

Maintaining student engagement is essential in managing a classroom and increasing positive academic behaviors. It was important to provide activities that were engaging and inclusive of all students. Classroom pedagogy and curriculum was a crucial factor in increasing student engagement. A level 2 student had an interesting idea about how teachers should approach teaching, *“If I was a teacher, I would think like a student, they have to think if I was sitting in the chair and in this class, would I be interested in it?”* Many of the students I observed and interviewed were very social and “active”, they wanted a challenge and wanted stimulation. If students were given work that was challenging and stimulating, then it was more often at the upper levels. Students at the lower level noticed this.

Upper level classes get more things, the work can be more challenging, In the lower levels the work is easier so when they move on to the next grade(class) they don't know as much, because they never got the chance to learn it. (Level 2 female)

There were several indicators of engagement. However, many of the desired behavior were not necessarily indicators of engagement. As one teacher commented, *“just because a student is quiet or sitting still does not mean they are engaged”*. When students were engaged, they were paying attention and asking questions either to the teacher or to their classmates.

When students were engaged in a class, they were less disruptive. In the lower level classes, when students were interested in the subject matter and the lesson required student participation, the students were engaged and exhibited positive academic behavior. When I observed a poorly-managed class on several occasions, I noticed a pattern: when the lesson required students to participate, such as reading aloud or acting out the scenes, to play the students were not only willing to participate, but also genuinely engaged in the task. When the lesson did not involve active learning or participation, such as when the teacher read to the students, the class was far more disengaged and uninterested.

During a level 2 literature class, I noticed a Black male was disengaged. He was acting out and when he was not acting out he was asleep. This caught my attention because the previous day in class he was engaged and actively participating. When he was engaged in the class he was reading the lead role of “Walter” in A Raisin in the Sun. When the teacher asked him why he is being disruptive that day, when he had been engaged the day before, he said, *“I’m not reading and I’m bored”*. Another level 2 Black male explained that he needs to be stimulated in class, *“we want excitement...like me and my brother we play around, we are bored.”* I asked him when he was most bored, he said, *“When she is reading to us or someone is reading in a boring voice...Some people don’t follow along.”* Over the course of my observations, I observed the literature class reading two different books: The Odyssey and Raisin in the Sun. The level 2 class was significantly more engaged when they were reading A Raisin in the Sun, especially when they were able to act out the scenes. The level 2 literature class was a double period, thus they would have class for 30 minutes and then the bell would ring. For other

students this meant changing classes, but these level 2 students stayed in the same class. The teacher would give them a break during this time, but many times students would not come back for the second half or they would come back late. However, on the days when they were reading A Raisin in the Sun they did not want to stop reading when the bell rang. Unlike previous classes, they actually came right back when class started. When the students were reading the Odyssey half of the class would not return for the second half.

The process of deciding who would read which character In the Raisin in the Sun was an intriguing process. Some students wanted the character that had the most speaking parts; many students looked for characters that matched their gender and ethnicity. In the beginning of the lesson, when students were deciding who was going to read which part, the one White male in the level 2 class was deciding on a part. He tried to get “Walter” but that was taken quickly. The only part left was “Mama”. This created a moment of comic relief; the students started making jokes and laughing picturing this White male as an old Black woman.

Although, it did not appear that the Black students were malicious in their joking, they were encouraging him to take the part. The White male student may have taken the joking as an affront, because he decided not to read at all. At the end of the class, the White male students said, *“I’m tired of reading these Black people books. When are we going to read a White persons book.”* The teachers were very embarrassed, because they knew that I overheard him. The teacher said, *“That is unfair, this is the first book we have read with majority Black characters,* she continued, *“you shouldn’t say things like that”*. When the

student leaves, she said to me *“I know he didn’t mean anything by that, but I don’t know why he would say that.”*

I noticed that students appreciated when teachers assisted them in the learning process by scaffolding and asking questions and not just giving them the answer. A high achieving Black female had this to say about why her Math class was her favorite class, *“I didn’t like it last year, and I don’t think the teaching was that good. I think it is really my teacher why I like it; because he teaches he doesn’t just tell us what we have to do. He asks us questions and by the end of class we figure it out on our own”*. Level 2 students also wanted to receive more assistance and feedback in the classroom. However, often in the level 2 classes, students did not experience the same positive learning environment. A lower level student, Samantha, described her frustration,

Kids need extra help and guidance but they don’t know where to find it. In my one class the teacher just gives us work or tell us to read and then gets on the computer then give a test the next week, everyone fails except a few students then he blames it on us a says because we are loud, we are only loud because he puts in no effort.

Another level 2 described one of his classes, *“the teacher doesn’t do anything, he will say read this and he will sit in the back and go on the computer and I’m just like you are not helping us at all.”* As the comments show many level 2 students felt neglected. Many level 2 students did not receive a stimulating learning environment, nor did they receive help while in class. In some instances, there were too many students in the class; and many of these students needed individualized assistance.

I observed one poorly-managed level 2 class often, and would occasionally intervene to help the teacher gain control of the class, especially when there was a substitute. I would interject and tell the students to *“sit down, be quiet and pay*

attention". Usually the students obeyed my request. In Mrs. Hill's class, there was one student, Derek, who was the most disruptive. He would never do any work. He would constantly talk out of turn; harass the teacher and other students. During my time at the school, he was suspended several times for fighting. However, he was always friendly towards me. He would come and say hello if I was sitting in the back of the classroom. If he was acting out and I told him to stop, he would obey. I was very intrigued by this young man. Most teachers had nothing but bad things to say about him. He was a "trouble maker".

One day there was a substitute and the students were given an assignment in their workbooks. I noticed that students were being very disruptive and not working. One group of boys did not open their books. Derek was in this group. I decided to intervene before they got completely out of control. I moved to their group and told them to take out their books. We began to read the assignment aloud together. I immediately noticed that Derek was having a difficult time reading the text. The assignment was for the students to read a passage and input the missing vocabulary words. To do this assignment, the student needed to have a basic comprehension of the passage as well as the ability to comprehend the vocabulary words. As I worked with Derek one-on-one, I noticed that he was not acting out; he was sitting still and actually trying to do the work.

It was very frustrating to see him struggle with reading comprehension. He and I would work together often. Similar, to the other students who were struggling academically, when he was receiving academic support, his behavior was drastically different from when he was not receiving the academic support he desperately needed. The teacher did not push them academically. In Mrs. Hill's class, they were often told

the answers. They did not have to think critically or creatively to answer questions. The students would rather read than have the teacher read to them. When she was reading, some of them were in a daze.

It appeared that many students will disengage or act out if they are having difficulty with the classroom work. There were several students in the lower level literature class who were reading on an elementary grade level, while in the same lower level class there were students who could and should have been in a higher level class, based on their test scores. Because there were so many students in the lower level class, the students who needed the extra academic support were not able to receive it. The lower level classes were too large to provide students with sufficient academic support.

Summary

Several factors contributed to the successful management of classrooms, such as teacher expectations and perceptions of students, and consistent rules and regulations. My findings suggest there are two types of classes: well managed and poorly-managed classrooms. The classroom management influences the classroom climate and student behavior, especially in lower level classes. In the well-managed classrooms, students were engaged and exhibiting positive academic behaviors. There were observed differences in teacher expectations of students in the lower level and upper level. Teachers had higher academic and behavioral expectations for students in level 4. Teachers perceived lower level students as lacking necessary home support or capacity for learning and positive behaviors. Several lower level students felt that they did not receive enough academic support from their teachers.

Chapter 6: Academic Self-Concept and Motivation

Academic self-concept is one's perception of t academic ability. Research has shown that perception of academic ability is linked to academic achievement (Craven & Marsh, 2008). However, researchers have yet to determine which comes first, positive academic self-concept and then academic achievement or academic achievement and then positive academic self-concept. Students who perceive themselves to be high achievers and academically competent often outperform students who do not perceive themselves as high achievers or academically competent. When students feel confident in their ability they are more likely to put forth effort and persist towards success in the academic domain (Marsh, et. al 2005).

Motivation is another key component of academic achievement. Academic motivation is what drives a student to be academically successful (Covington, 2000). Motivation is a perplex concept that is significant to the study of achievement and educational success, thus it is important aspect of this study. Specifically, this study aimed to understand how the educational environment influences student motivation and achievement goals. Figure 2 describes the relationship between components of academic self-concept and motivation.

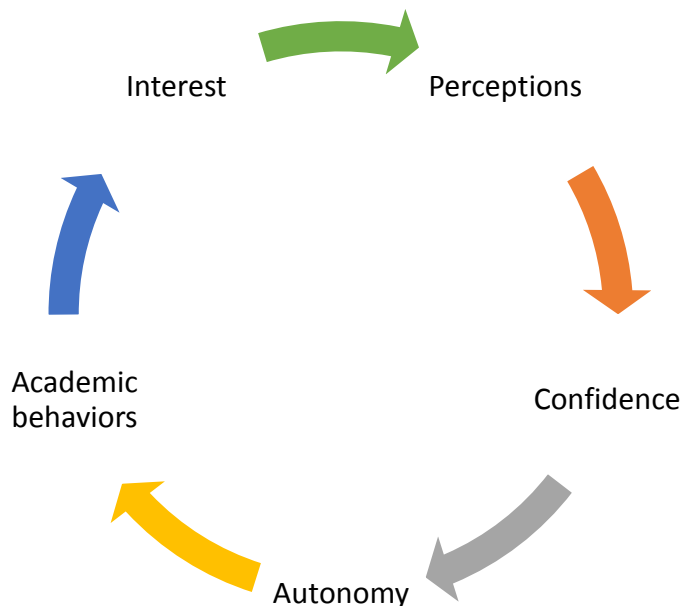


Figure 2. Model of Academic Self-Concept and Motivation Factors that Influence Academic Performance

Perceptions and Expectations of Ability

During a faculty meeting, the discussion turned to the lack of Black students in honors and AP classes. There was a consensus that the Black students, specifically lower level students, lacked motivation. One teacher commented, *“The students don’t want to [be in advanced courses] because they don’t want to leave their friends.”* *“They don’t want to do the extra work, they are not motivated.”* Several teachers believed that Black students were distracted by their friends more than White students, thus they needed more support to focus on academics. During this same meeting a Black teacher suggested that they separate all the Black students who were on the cusp [of academic success], so they would only be around other Black students who were deemed as motivated and capable as they were. However, this suggestion was quickly dismissed, because essentially it would create more segregation and alienation of Black students.

Faculty discussions and comments surrounding the achievement of Black students centered on the perception of the students ability, but more so on their motivation to be academically successful and whether or not they had family support. The faculty as well as many students believed that the low achievement of Black students and lower level students was a result of individual characteristics and the student's home environment was also perceived as a reason for academic underperformance; with many teachers and students stating that students who did not do well in school came from a lower social class with parents who did not care about their student's academic success, *"those students are not as motivated because their parents don't push them to do well"* - Erik upper level White male. Another White male student commented, *"I think that home customs have a lot to do with their behavior at school."* Teachers as well as students held the belief that the students in the lower level, which were majority Black students, did not care about their grades or academic achievement, *"It's not that they aren't as smart, they just don't do the work, I guess they don't really care about stuff like that"* - Upper Level Black Female.

My conversations revealed that students, regardless of level, cared about their grades and how others perceived their academic ability. I observed several motivated level 2 students. Denton was a very motivated level 2 student. I first met him in the well managed Math class. I immediately noticed his enthusiasm and focus. He was very attentive and eager to answer questions or ask a question for clarification. One day the class was a little rowdy during the review and the teacher refused to continue the review, Denton was visibly upset and let his fellow classmates know that it was not acceptable for them to disrupt during a review for an exam. During the first half of the school year

Denton struggled with low grades, but he improved his grades dramatically by the end of the school term, *“I didn’t take school seriously in the beginning. I didn’t realize how serious it is, in middle school you can’t really fail but now [in high school] you can [fail]”*.

The school promotes a college going culture and all of the students who participated in this study wanted to go to college and believed that they would go to college regardless of their level. Students did not want to be viewed as dumb or low performing by their classmates. Many of the lower level students sought validation and affirmation from their teachers. *“Students need to be validated I think, sometime the way the teacher compliments you in front of the class and the other kids want to be like you, it makes you feel good”*- Denton, lower level Black male.

Derek, a level 2 Black male, would often demand attention from the teacher; unfortunately not all of his attention-getting strategies were positive. Derek wanted the teacher’s undivided attention and he wanted her to confirm that he was smart and capable. One class he was being particularly rambunctious. The teacher was trying to get him to do his classwork, but he was not focused. However, seemingly unprovoked he exclaimed, *“I’m smart”*, Ms. Garrett replied, *“I know you are smart, I need you to prove it, you can get and A this marking period, but you need to do your work”*. Students were working diligently on an in-class assignment however, Derek was struggling.

When Rashawn called him “retarded,” and Derek became frustrated and quit trying. Then Tyson called another student stupid and she was visibly upset by being called so. There were several indicators that students not only cared about being perceived as smart, they also cared about their grades. For example, when teachers

returned grades, students were eager to see what other students received on the assignment. When Derek got his exam back, another male student snatched his exam and looked at his grade and yelled “*you dumb as Hell*”. Derek, appeared to be jolted by this comment, he yelled back “*shut up*”. Students displayed pride when they were recognized for academic improvement and success. Rashad, a lower level Black male, described his proudest academic moment,

In 8th grade, I failed every single class after my brother died, I started participating more, the week before the last day of school we had an assembly and I got most improved. I felt so good, my mom and Dad came up, [as he is describing this moment I can hear the pride in his voice] -

I attended the high school’s most improved banquet and I observed how proud and happy students were to receive recognition. Although many of these students did not have high grade point averages or test scores, there was no denying how important this event was for the students but also for the parents and teachers. At one point a dad brought the audience to tears when he told the crowd how happy he is that his son received this recognition, “*I am so happy at this moment, we have had so many ups and downs, I didn’t think he would finish... but I am grateful that we made it*”. His son had struggled all through high school, but he was not only graduating from high school, he even made the honor roll.

Most students believed that honors classes had more difficult work and greater expectations of the students. A lower level Black female described honors classes, “*Its College level work very, very hard, and lots of questions on one sheet. I have only written like two essays all year. I think it’s a higher level, they do college work.*” When I asked her how level 2 students feel about being labeled as level 2 she said, “*It don’t feel good, because like no one wants to be in level 2, that’s an insult, but other than that we*

don't really talk about it. Everyone knows what the levels mean." Jessica, a lower level female described her least favorite class, *"History, he doesn't give us enough work. Just something to read and then a worksheet and then a test. It doesn't work out for me."*

Most students did not explicitly state that honors students were smarter than the lower level students. Students in honors were perceived as being more studious and motivated, and also having more opportunities to learn than level 2 students, *"honors, it's not like the students are smarter, like they might be doing stuff way before we do it"*-Jessica, Lower level Black female.

Level 4 students also believed that level 2 students did not learn as much as honor classes and worked at a slower pace, *"It's the pace, sometimes not necessarily the work, and they don't get to as much stuff"*. A level 2 Black female reported, *"My teacher always says that in his honors classes it's the completion of homework and in my class they don't."*

However, there were some lower level students who reported that they felt that they were perceived as not as smart as other students, *"I think we are viewed as not as smart, because of our grades- Sheila lower level Black female"*. Other level 2 students believed that honors students were smart because they did all of their work and were not disruptive in class, *"most likely they are smarter, they do all their homework"* said one level 2 Black female. Likewise, other level 2 students conveyed beliefs about the upper level students were better students because they exhibited positive academic behaviors. *"An honor student don't let distractions get to you, you pay attention, you do all your work, don't disrupt class, d and f students, cause disruption, they disrespect people, don't*

do their homework- Chris lower level Black male. A motivated level 2 Black male believed that honors students had more work and were exposed to more rigor.

I think level 2 classes give you a lot of breaks, they have a lot more class time and in like high levels they have a lot of work and like high expectations, so like they learn more and they get more test and quizzes, we just have like, I wouldn't say easy but less harder, and like umm I'm not really sure, because I never seen the difference –John, lower level Black male.

Academic Confidence: Expectancy Value and Self-efficacy

Expectancy is one beliefs about how well he or she will perform on a given task and the value placed on the task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Expectancy- value theory asserts that student performance can be explained by their perception of how well they will do on the task and the extent to which they value the task. Self-efficacy is the belief that one has the required skills and behaviors necessary to accomplish the desired outcome, in this it is more about the possibility of completing a task (Sanders & Sanders, 2006). Self-efficacy refers to competency, while expectancy refers to the likelihood of engaging in the task (Sanders & Sanders, 2006).

Student interviews showed differences in student academic confidence between the lower level students and upper level students. Students in the lower level classes were often unsure of their ability and frustrated with their academic performance, and the frustration led to a decrease in effort in many cases as one level 2 Black male explained, *“if I don't understand something I get very frustrated and just put my head down.”* Additionally, when upper level Black students were not confident in their academic ability, specifically on a classroom task or in class assignment, they were less likely to ask for help, because they did not want to be perceived as dumb. Mark an upper level Black male stated, *“I don't often ask for help in class, in front of the class...I'm usually the only Black male in the class and I don't want to look stupid.”* Many of the level 2

students held the perception that they were perceived as less academically capable than honors, *“I know they think we are dumb, but they get more opportunities than we get”*. Many students did not feel that lower level students and upper level students could coexist in the same class; many felt that, “it just couldn’t work.” A lower level student felt that she would be overshadowed and over-powered by level 4 students,

Because, if a level 4 or honors student in a class with a level 2 student they would ask all the questions, raise their hand constantly, and if the teacher calls on level 2 student and they don’t know the answer they would feel bad and dumb, the level 4 or honors student would over power us- Kandi lower level Black female

Katie, an upper level White female, also believed that mixed level classes were a bad idea, *“I don’t think I would want to be in a class with level 2 students, I just don’t think it’s a good idea.”* In Mrs. Garrett’s level 2 Math class, the students were learning how to plot coordinates. They were trying to follow along as she worked problems on the smart board, but several students were having difficulty keeping up. One Black male wanted her to put a problem back on the screen after she took it down, but he did not speak up. He mumbled a request, but the teacher did not hear him, thus she continued on to the next problem. In the level 4 honors class, the same situation occurred where the teacher was working on the smart board and she moved to the next problem. The students did not hesitate to ask the teacher to go back to the previous slide, in fact, immediately several students shouted out, *“Hold up”, “Go back”, “I’m not finished writing”*.

Many of the level 2 students would explicitly state that they were “not good” at a subject or task. In Mrs. Garrett’s level 2 Math class Liz exclaimed, *“I don’t know how to do it”*. She followed Mrs. Garrett around the room whining and trying to get her

attention, *"I can't do it! Help me!"* Another Black male said *"I'm not good at Math, I hate this"*. He seemed to be annoyed. When I asked him if he was alright, he said *"I can't do Math."* However, he started the problem, but when he started having difficulty, he became frustrated and did not try again. Several of the students appeared hesitant to try to work on their own. Ms. Garrett tried to work with Derek one-on-one. She asked him what was $1/3$ he said, *"I don't know, I can't do this."* She did not push him to try, she had several other students who were in need of her attention. The in-class support teacher worked with Derek one-on-one and as long as she gave him her undivided attention he was engaged and he tried. However, Derek would give up if the teacher was not working with him one-on-one.

Often in Mrs. Hill's lower level English class, the students would display a lack of confidence. For example when Mrs. Hill asked students to find line in the Odyssey, a Black female found the correct line, but she did not want to read it out loud, she gave the page number to the teacher so the teacher could read it for her. Some lower level students reported that they did not believe that they were as knowledgeable as upper level students. Cory, a lower level Black male told me, *"I think lower level students just don't know as much as honor students."* Kelly proclaimed, *"The honors kids are ahead of us, I think they learn more in their classes."*

Motivated Black students also suffered from a lack of confidence in their academic ability. Most of the motivated level 2 students did not think that they would be recommended for honors and they did not believe that they could be successful in an honors class. A highly motivated Black male level 2 student did not believe that any teacher other than his physical education teacher would recommend him for honors. Carmen, a Black

female, who did well, considered herself lazy, and although she knew that colleges favored honors classes, she did not plan on taking any, because she was afraid of failing.

Me: Do you plan on taking honors or advanced classes in the future?

Carmen: No, I don't plan on taking honors classes... I know they are good for when colleges look at you and stuff but not if you fail.

Me: Do you think you would fail?

Carmen: Yes.

Me: Why?

Carmen: I don't have a good work ethic at home and I'm really lazy-

Marcus, a highly motivated Black male (who was eventually moved out of Mrs. Hill's double period level 2 class into a regular English class) wanted to be in honors. However, it appeared that he was unsure if he could be successful, *"I want to take honors classes, but I don't know if I would do well"*. An upper level Black female, Ashley, did not think she could be in level 4, but she was leveled up in 9th grade, *"I worked hard and had a good attitude; and I was moved from level 3 to level 4,*

Like I wasn't in a level 4 history class last year, I was in level 3 and like I did all the work but it's not like it really occurred to me like I could move up a level because I did that, I just felt like I need to step, but I felt that I should try to improve, and when the mail came with the level that I was going to have I was like Oh My God, I'm in honors classes I couldn't believe it. I never thought I was good enough.

An interesting finding was that the level 4 White students were more confident and sure that they would take advanced placement classes. In fact many of them would start taking AP classes during their sophomore year. They already had their classes planned through their senior year, with how many AP classes they would take each year.

On the other hand, the level 4 Black students were not as confident that they would be taking AP classes in the future.

Autonomy and Critical Thinking

Autonomy and competence are essential to intrinsic motivation (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Students are “autonomous when they willingly devote time and energy to their studies” and students are competent when they feel able to meet academic challenges (Niemiec & Ryan, p. 4). Both autonomy and competence are also related to confidence; if a student feels that he or she can meet a challenge, then he or she will be more willing to attempt a task and put forth effort without being prompted to do so. Deci et al (1980) found that students who had autonomy supportive teachers were more competent, had more self-esteem and more intrinsic motivation as compared to students with more controlling teachers. Research has found that when students have autonomy in the classroom, they have more positive academic outcomes (Chirkov and Ryan, 2001; Reeve et al, 2002).

Students in the upper level classes were expected to work independently. Many teachers felt that students in lower level did not have the ability or drive to work independently or meet academic challenges. Many level 2 students also felt that they did not have the ability to meet academic challenges; however, they also understood that upper level students had more academic opportunities,

Well, umm level 2 you need more help, you don't know the material, in upper classes they give you more space to do your work; like honors biology won't get a word bank but level 3 will.
(Lower level Black male)

Mr. Baxter, the Math teacher, believed that level 2 students are “spoon-fed.” *“They are given everything. The way they have been taught is just being spoon fed everything. They now expect you to provide every single thing, to do everything for them. They are not used to putting forth any effort.”* In Mrs. Hill’s level 2 class, she would often read to them. During this time many students would be asleep, others would talk to their friends or do other school work. Reading to the students did not allow them an opportunity to actively participate. It also created opportunity for students to become disengaged in the lesson.

When Mrs. Hill would read to the honor class they did not seem interested, but they continued to focus or at least they appeared to pay attention. An upper level female told me, *“I hate my English class, it’s so boring, especially when she reads to us; usually I do my geometry homework.”* Unlike the upper level students, when the level 2 students were not engaged they would resort to acting out. Chris, a level 2 student, would often walk around the classroom, and yell out while the teacher was reading or he would sleep. Many of the students in Ms. Smith level 2 English class were more engaged when they had an opportunity to participate in the lesson such as when they were allowed to read out loud different parts in a play.

When students were given autonomy and encouragement to work independently, they had greater academic self-concept. For example, in Mr. Baxter’s level 2 class he expected students to take ownership of their learning. There was a set routine, when students entered the classroom their daily assignment was on the board, and they knew what tasks were due by the end of the class. Students were expected to work on their assignments independently in class. Many teachers and students believed that the level 2

students were not capable of challenging work or working independently. Mr. Baxter believed that the level 2 students were at a disadvantage because they had been on a lower level track for many years prior to high school, and once they were in high school they were not encouraged to put forth effort, and they did not understand how effort, was linked to their future goals and plans,

Level 4 students are motivated because they connect it with their future goals and plans. Level 2 don't see any connection. They are given everything. The way they have been taught is just being spoon fed everything. They now expect you to provide every single thing... [To do everything for them]. They are not used to putting forth any effort- Mr. Baxter, Math teacher

Academic Behaviors: Seeking help, Study Habits and Self-regulation

Positive academic behaviors such as help-seeking, good study habits and self-regulation are all essential to academic success. My interviews showed that although there were several resources available to students for academic support, many students were unaware of the resources. Or if they did know of the resources they did not always utilize them. However, there were special programs provided to selected students. One such program was the Bridge to Success (Bridge) program. This program identified "at risk" eighth grade students and prepared them for high school. In the summer selected students attended a five-week program and during the year they had access to a counselor who provided academic and social support. Sean, a level 2 Black male, who is in the Bridge program went to the counselors for tutoring and emotional support. He told me that he went to the Bridge counselors for help instead of his teachers. He felt more comfortable with the Bridge staff,

Probably during end of marking period, I went to a teacher I met in the bridge program, they give you credits...I went to teacher she explained biology. She made it fun and interesting. I met her and she asked how I

was doing in biology I said not well. She asked if I wanted to keep coming, so I came. It's helping. - Level 2 Black male

Similar to findings in other studies, the participants in this study reported that they did not seek help from teachers outside of the classroom on a regular basis. However, level 4 students and motivated level 2 students would go before exams or if they needed clarification. Although all of the motivated students sought help at school for specific reasons, some White student participants reported that they had outside tutors for help on their homework and for test preparation,

When I was younger I had lots of tutoring, like two hours after school, because I had a really bad teacher in third grade. I am getting tutoring now and I learn more in one session with my tutor than I do in a whole year-
level 4 White male

An observable difference between motivated and academically successful students were their ability to self-regulate. Self-regulation includes planning, monitoring and modifying cognitive strategies (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). When a student self-regulates he or she actively pursues, manages, and engages in the learning process. For example, in the level 4 literature class, if a student missed a class upon their return, they would immediately ask the teacher what they missed and how they could make up the work. Not only did they talk with the teacher upon their return, but they notified the teacher ahead of time that they were going to miss class. In Mrs. Hill level 4 English class, Kelly addressed the teacher in the beginning of class to say, *"Ms. Smith, don't forget that I will not be in class tomorrow, can you give me my work now."* This student was taking ownership of her learning, by making sure that she would not miss any work and that missing class would not count negatively towards her grade.

Unmotivated students with low academic self-concept did not demonstrate self-regulation. Students in Mrs. Hill's lower level English class would often leave class on "bathroom break" and not return for 15 minutes. When Eric missed three days in a row, he came back to class and did not display any concern for his grade. The teacher asked him about his absences, but he did not ask about missed work. Observations of lower level classes showed that the lack of autonomy in level 2 classes was related to the lack of self-regulatory strategies in level 2 students.

The students did not have opportunities to develop cognitive strategies that are crucial to the development of positive academic behaviors. In addition, the unmotivated students (regardless of level) observed in this study did not demonstrate self-regulation they often did not make connections between homework nor did they demonstrate an understanding of cognitive strategies such as self-regulation. Level 4 students were able to stay focused despite distractions in the classroom such as noisy classmates while level 2 students were easily distracted.

All student participants stated beliefs that students who do well in school exhibit certain behaviors such as doing homework and not being distracted, *"the students who make A's they go after school[for help]; they ask questions during lesson, and get their homework done"*- level 2 Black male. Although level 2 students realized that certain behaviors are necessary for success, they did not embody those behaviors,

Difference between good students and bad students is good students do their work and pay attention. They don't skip. If it's [school work] really hard I may give up. The students who make A's they go after school they ask questions during lesson, get their homework done, if I don't understand something, I get very frustrated and just put my head down – Carl, lower level Black male

Content analysis of interview and observation data showed that Black students, regardless of level, did not always demonstrate positive academic behaviors such as help-seeking or asking questions in class. Many upper level Black students did not want to be perceived as dumb or incompetent, thus they did not ask questions, *“Sometimes, I feel dumb, if you don’t get something this one girl just keeps saying ‘how can you not get that’ ‘why don’t you understand’ over and over”*- level 4 Black female.

Students admitted that when they became frustrated or faced challenges, it was more difficult to exhibit positive academic behaviors,

I do my homework, I procrastinate, and I will do it in the morning at breakfast or late at night. If I work on something all week and I got the concept, it’s no point in studying. If I don’t understand it, it’s no point in studying - level 2 Black male

This student did not connect studying with learning. He stated that there was no point in studying if he got the concept, but also no point in studying if he did not understand the concept. This student attitude was similar to many students at the school: they did not connect studying with learning or as a necessary component of school. Even my high achieving level 4 students reported that they did not “study” often, *“No I don’t do study groups or study everyday sometimes. I study the night before an exam, it depends on the class”*- level 4 White male.

In large part, the difference between the level 2 students and the level 4 students was that level 4 students understood the connection between studying and doing well in school. Even if they did not “study” every day, they did know how to study effectively for texts and exams, and they did their homework. The level 4 students went to the teacher for specific questions or for a very difficult class; Jennifer an upper level female

reported, *“I don’t go often [to get help from teacher], only if I have a specific question, last time I went in for help was early in the year for help with geometry.* Jennifer was a very high achieving Black/mixed female, in fact, she was in geometry, the highest level of ninth grade math. She explained that most students do not study [every day], but she always does her homework and she studies for exams.

Persistence and effort were two factors that contributed to academic success, especially for level 2 students. Level 4 students also needed persistence and effort. However, they did not face as many academic experiences that required extreme persistence or effort. The motivated level 2 students and Black level 4 students displayed significant persistence and effort. Amber, a Black female who was leveled up to level 4 in ninth grade, was a highly motivated and persistent student. She demonstrated a very strong work ethic. She also believed that she had to work harder than the other level 4 students,

I don’t do well on test. Sometimes I try to study like a week ahead of time, I will try to figure out the stuff I don’t know, but I don’t always have a lot of time to study so sometimes I end up studying at the last minute.

All the students in this study reported that Biology was the most difficult course during their ninth grade year. However, some students had more positive experiences in Biology compared to other students. Because it was a difficult class, the majority of the level 2 students’ interviewed stated that it was their least favorite class and least favorite teacher. However, some White level 4 students reported that although it was a difficult class, they still liked it and liked their teacher. When students faced academic challenges such as those faced in biology, they could either meet the challenge or fail, and when students

failed especially a student with low academic self-concept, he or she would be more likely to not persist or not exert more effort,

When you are not understanding it and the teacher doesn't help and then you don't care anymore. If she is not explaining it right, and she doesn't try to help you understand even when you really want to, I just give up-
James, level 2 Black male

Other level 2 students also mentioned the teacher as a source of motivation for persistence and effort. The level 2 students relied on their teacher for more help, although they did not often seek the help, *"we don't get enough attention, in like biology, the teacher doesn't notice me, I know they have other people to worry about, but for us that's really struggling they could help."* Many level 2 students believed that the teacher should help them even if they do not seek the teacher's assistance.

Observations showed that unmotivated lower level students displayed negative academic behaviors such as not studying or being disruptive in class. Such negative behaviors (acting out, disrupting other students, sleeping) can be viewed as protective strategies. These strategies were employed to take attention away from the fact that they were facing an academic challenge or did not understand the material. For instance, there was James, Nancy, and Chris in Mrs. Hill's lower level English class. During class, James had on his backpack with his feet on the chair in front of him, with his eyes closed. Nancy did not have a notebook or anything to write with; she was just staring into space. Chris was dancing around the room, cursing and pestering the girls in the class. In this particular level 2 class, it took the students a considerable amount of time to settle down, and get to their seats. The class lacked a routine or structure, thus the students often wander around aimlessly.

In poorly-managed classes, students did not take ownership of their learning. In the lower level classes often students waited for the teacher to tell them explicitly what to do... step by step. Many of the students in the lower level lacked autonomy and self-regulation. In the level 2 English class, students left their binders and their work in the classroom every day. The binder was kept in a file cabinet in the back of the room. The students were to come in to the class and get their binders and go directly to their seats. However, I observed that the students rarely got their binders without being prompted to do so.

I spent considerable amount of time observing level 2 students: James, Nancy and Chris and Derek and I concluded that Derek had several academic challenges. He had difficulty with basic reading and comprehension. When someone worked with him one-on-one with a focus on helping him engage in the material, his negative behaviors decreased immensely. However, when he was left to do work on his own he either became disruptive or he would just stare into space. Nancy seemed to need academic support, but not as much as some of the other students. Her behavior was much better than many of the students in Mrs. Hill lower level English class. Over the course of the year, Nancy had spurts of engagement. When she was engaged, she participated in class discussions, she answered questions and she did her classwork.

During the second semester, Nancy was completing her homework and participating in class. She asked questions and answered questions during every class. The teacher recognized her for her improvement and how well she was doing, "*Nancy you are my favorite student right now, you are really on it!*" Mrs. Hill continued to praise Nancy for doing her homework. However, Derek became very upset by the praise given

to Nancy. He began to whine, *“I’m your favorite too. I’m your favorite!”* He then began to call Nancy a teacher’s pet. This embarrassed Nancy, her face flushed; she looked as if she wanted to disappear.

Derek’s reaction was not out of malice, but out of disappointment at not being recognized as the “favorite.” After class Mrs. Hill commented to me, *“I should not have did that to Nancy [praised her in front of the class], I was just so happy. I didn’t realize that any of the other students’ feelings would be hurt, Derek is very sensitive”*. Derek’s reaction also showed that level 2 students cared about how they were perceived. Derek wanted to be viewed favorably by his teacher. Over the course of several observations, it became apparent that although level 2 students appeared to not care about school, because they did not engage in positive academic behaviors, they did care about perceptions of them. They did not want to be viewed negatively.

James did not seem to have much difficulty academically. In fact, he was moved out of the learning strategies course during the second semester. Interestingly, he displayed negative academic behaviors. Although he understood the material, he would not do his work. When probed as to why he did not do his work, he said he was bored. When lower level students were not interested in the class or the assignment, they became bored. Many of them did not self-regulate to maintain on task or persist through difficult academic challenges as the upper level students did.

Interest: Component of Academic Engagement and Motivation

Research has shown that interest is a predictor of subsequent achievement.

Interest increased participation, which led to greater academic achievement (Tella, Tella & Adniyi, 2009). Several studies have postulated that interest is associated with

persistence, learning and positive affect (Hidi & Ainley, 2002; Koller et al., 2001; Krapp, 2007) which are all positively related to academic achievement. Csikszentmihalyi and Schiefele (1993) posit that “Interest-driven activities are characterized by the experience of competence and personal control; feelings of autonomy and self-determination; positive emotional states; and, under optimal circumstances, an experience of flow whereby the person and the object of interest merge” (p. 12).

My interviews showed that interest is import factor in student motivation. However, it was more significant for level 2 students. James would often comment that he was bored and that he was not interested in the class, *“I’m so bored, I don’t like book work and I don’t feel like being at school”*. When students are interested, they are more likely to pay attention, seek help and participate in class. I tried to reason with James and explain to him that although something is not interesting and even though you may be bored you still have to pay attention and participate. This concept was understood by the upper level students. Josh, in an upper level student reported English was an extremely boring class, his least favorite class. However, he knew that he had to do all of his work, even when it was a class that he was not interested in, *“English is so boring and the curriculum is repetitive, she is the worst teacher, I just go to that class and do the work, it’s easy.”*

Observations showed that interest was a catalyst for student engagement and motivation. In Mrs. Hill’s lower level English class, the students were disengaged and disruptive, *“We want excitement...like me and my brother we play around, because we are bored”*. When I asked Sean when he was most bored in class he said, *“When we have to read out loud...some people don’t follow along, it’s boring and students start acting*

out”. However when students were interested in the subject matter or task, their engagement increased drastically. A level 2 student, thought that school should be more interesting and that teachers should try to make their classes more interesting and engaging, *“If I was a teacher, I would think like a student. They have to think if I was sitting in the chair and doing this would I be interested in it.”*

When students were interested in a topic or assignment they were excited and engaged. In Mrs. Hill’s lower level English class, students were given an assignment to use their notes [from the book *Odyssey*] to discuss double standards and provide examples from real life or the readings. Students, particularly the girls, were engaged in the discussion because they could give real life examples. Typically, many of the females in the class would be disengaged and appear to be dis-identified with the academic domain. For example, Gabriella never participated in class; most days she was either asleep or talking to her friend. During this class Gabriella was excited and fully engaged. She talked about her culture and how the women have to do all the housework and her dad does nothing. The males were also a part of the discourse; however, the female students were far more passionate. At one moment, the students became very loud and the teacher said they would have to settle down or end the discussion, Gabriella started yelling at everyone to stop being disruptive. This is intriguing because she typically was very uninterested in every aspect of the class. The discussions on gender roles and double standards were a source of interest, because it was related to their real life experiences.

The level 2 students were also very interested in A Raisin in the Sun, *“Reading A Raisin in the Sun has been the best part of English, It connected to me and it was really interesting, how life was back then and how life is right now, we are reading Shakespeare*

now and it's really boring" - level 2 Black female. The students wanted to feel a connection and a relationship to the material they were learning in class, "Sometimes we just *don't want to do the work, because the work they give us is so boring, I think at the beginning of the year they should ask us what we want to learn about and take suggestions.*" When students were provided with opportunities to connect their own life experiences to the literature, they were more likely to be engaged and to identify with the academic domain. Students were more likely to be engaged if it was a subject they liked or felt connected to. For example, Matt liked History, *"I enjoy learning about stuff from the past, and it's interesting to me. Before I used to get bad grades in social studies, but this year it's my highest performance."*

Summary

Academic self-concept and motivation are two related factors that are essential to academic achievement. When a student feels confident in his or her ability to complete an academic task they are more motivated to do well. They are more motivated to engage in positive academic behaviors and self-regulation such as help seeking, in class participation and completion of homework. Student perceptions of student ability varied by level, with students in the lower level being perceived as more confident in their academic ability as well as having greater academic ability compared to students in the lower level. Level 2 students reported that they did not feel that they would be able to compete with level 4 students and if they were in class together the level 4 students would make the level 2 student feel "dumb". Students, regardless of level, did not want to feel or be perceived as incompetent. Student classroom behavior was also related to academic self-concept. Students exhibited self-protective behaviors, such as acting out to distract from attention on their academic ability. When Derek was struggling with an assignment he would start

harassing the student next to him. Lower level students with low academic self-concept were more likely to be disruptive in class when they were faced with an academic challenge. Several of the level 2 students did not feel confident in their ability and were fearful of looking incompetent.

There were observable differences in student motivation levels. However, there were no observable differences between motivated level 2 students and motivated level 4 students. Motivated students regardless of level were more engaged in class, asked more questions, and were more self-regulating. Students who lacked academic motivation were less likely to participate in class they were less autonomous and self-regulating and they did not seek help. Interest was a catalyst for student motivation. When students were interested in a task or subject, they were more likely to be motivated and engaged. When provided with opportunities to connect an assignment or subject to real life experiences or relate in a more personal way, level 2 students. **Figure 3** describes the relationship between perceptions, confidence, academic behaviors and interest.

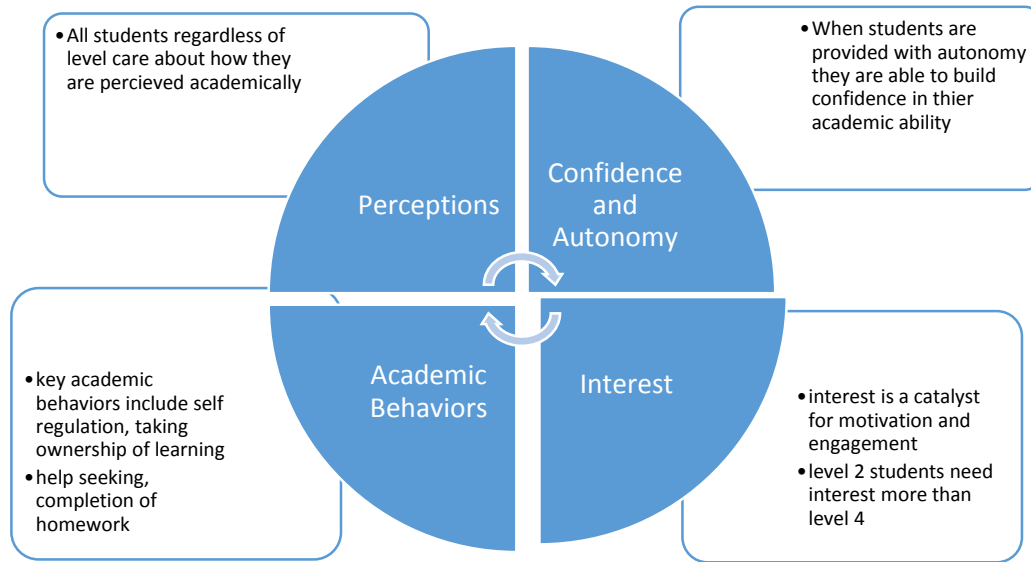


Figure 3. Model of Factors that Influence Academic Self-Concept and Motivation

Chapter 7: Quantitative Results

Quantitative analyses of student surveys were used to investigate several research questions, including:

1. How do students' score on the survey measures of academic self-concept, climate and motivation?
2. What are the relationships among the measures?
3. How is race, gender and level related to each measure?

Specifically, I concerned with the relationship between academic self-concept and motivation. Additionally, I wanted to investigate any differences in perceptions of school climate, academic self-concept, and motivation for students by level, gender and race/ethnicity. Academic self-concept is the perception that one has of his or her academic ability: A student's confidence in her ability to be successful in the academic domain (Ireson & Hallam, 2009). Research has shown that when students believe they can be successful at a given task, they are likely to put forth more academic effort. Researchers argue that there are three types of academic motivation, all of which are measured in this study: performance-approach, performance-avoidance and mastery approach. These constructs consider the reasons students engage in academic task (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Legget, 1988). Students with performance orientations are focused on demonstrating ability, while those with mastery orientation are focused on increasing academic competence (Wolters, 2004).

Research has shown a relationship between school climate and academic performance. School climate encompasses all of the characteristics of school including the school building and the interactions between students and teachers (Marshall, 2004). For this study, I included a subcomponent of school climate: racial school climate.

Racial school climate is students' perceptions of interactions with teachers and students of a different race. The racial climate assess how students of different races are treated and how students perceive racial prejudice or discrimination in the academic domain. Students who face racial discrimination are at great risk for negative academic outcomes (Eccles et al, 2006).

PHS, has a diverse student population, however it has students separated by perceived ability. Oakes (1985) found that students who were tracked into low ability groups had lower academic self-concept than students in the high ability groups. In her study, these academic groups were segregated by race: the lower level groups were majority Black and the upper level groups are majority White. This type of structure can create a negative racial climate. This type of racial grouping can stigmatize Black students as academically inferior (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

Demographics Characteristics of the Survey Sample

Table 7 shows the demographics of the students who took the survey. For the purpose of this study, I combined all Black students, regardless of ethnicity, and categorized these students as "Black" Hispanic and Asian students were categorized "Other"; and all White students were categorized as "White". I further reduced the data to the analysis of Black and White students only, because they were the focus of the data analysis.

Table 7. Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Sample and their Parents

			N	%
Gender	Female		52	47.3
	Male		57	51.8
Ethnicity	Black	African American	43	39.0
		African	6	5.4
		Caribbean	12	10.9
	White		38	34.5
	Hispanic		4	3.6
	Asian/PI		3	2.7
	Other		4	3.6

I asked students to report their parents' education levels. Based on student report, parents were well educated. Approximately 45% of all parents had a college degree and approximately 30% had a graduate degree. Black mothers (24.2%) and Black fathers (24.5%) in this study have higher percentages of college degrees compared to the national percentage of Black people (11.6%) with college degrees (Ogunwole, Drewery, Rios-Vorgas, 2012).

Table 8 shows the overall percentages for reported level of education completed by both the mother and the father.

Table 8. Highest Level of Education That Was Completed by Mother and Father

	N	GED	High School	Community College	Some College	College	Graduate school
Mother	86	1.8	10.9	2.7	7.3	34.5	29.1
Father	83	1.8	14.5	2.7	4.5	38.2	23.6

The Survey Sample and Leveling
Leveling at PHS is complex....

Table 9 is a chart of the 2012-2013 system. This chart was presented in the student/parent 2012-2013 handbook.

Table 9. PHS levels and level descriptions for the 2012-2013 school year

Levels	Level Description
Level 2	An academic general level for students in need of additional skill development
Level 3	An academic college preparatory level
Level 4	An honors level
Level 5	An advanced honors level designed for students with exceptional academic ability in a particular subject area
Level 6	An advanced Placement level designed for students who are doing college level work in a particular subject area

For the purposes of these analyses, the levels are categorized as lower level and upper level, because the categories are subjective, due to student self-report. Many classes were deleveled to level 2 and level 4 instead of 5 levels. During this school year,

students in several subjects experienced variations in the leveling system. For example, 9th grade history had only two levels: Literary Strategies or Honors. Literary Strategies was essentially level 2 and Honors was level 4. While Math had 5 levels. Due to this mixed de-leveling the leveling system varied according to content area and level labels were not as defined.

Table 10 shows the leveling changes made in each content area during the 2012-2013 academic year.

Table 10. PHS Ninth Grade Content areas and Level Changes

Subject	2011-2012	2012-2013
English I	Levels 2,3,4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literary Strategies (double period) • Level 2&3 (combined) • Honors
World History	Levels 2,3,4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World History ELL • Literary Strategies • Honors
Biology	Levels 2,3,4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 2&3 (combined) • Honors
Math	Levels 2,3,4,5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 2 • Level 3 • Level 4 (Honors) • Level 5 (Geometry)

Fifty-eight students reported mostly level 2 or mostly level 2 and 3 (“lower level”), 52 reported mostly level 4 (“upper level”). These categories are somewhat subjective, due to student self-report. During this school year, students in several subjects experienced variations in the leveling system. For example, 9th grade history had

only two levels: Literary Strategies or Honors. Literary Strategies was essentially level 2 and Honors was level 4. While Math had 5 levels. Due to this mixed de-leveling the leveling system varied according to content area and level labels were not as defined.

Figure 4: race and gender composition of each level (60% of lower level were Black boys, 33% were Black girls, 9% White males, and 4% White females). In the upper level, 22% were Black female, 6% were Black males, 25% were White males, and 40% were White females.

Figure 4. Percentage of Black and White females and Black and White Males in each Level

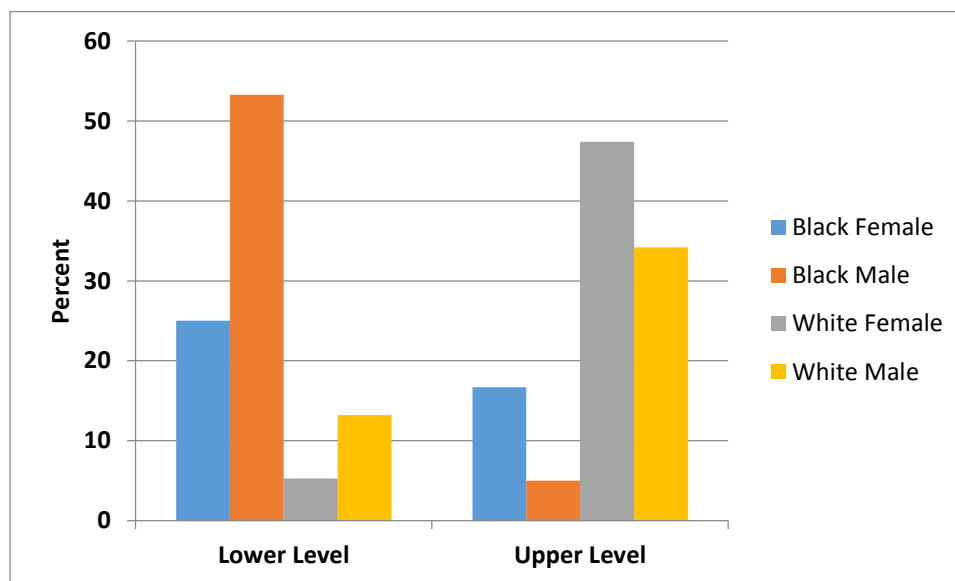
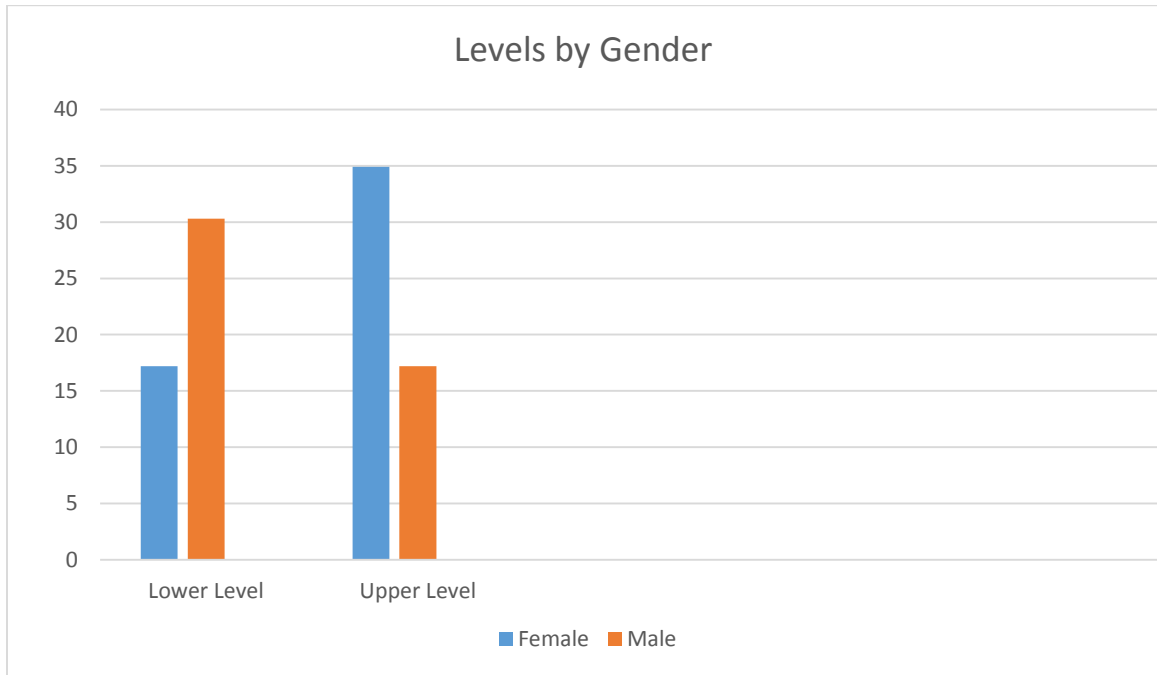


Figure 5: percent race in different levels by gender, 91.4% of Black boys were in lower level, 60% of all Black females were in lower level. 90% of White females were in the upper level and 72% of White males were in the upper level.

Figure 5. Percentage of Females and Males in each level**Table 11. Descriptive Statistics for Each Measure**

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Academic Self-Concept	110	1.50	5.00	3.70	0.97
Performance Approach	110	1.00	5.00	2.88	0.99
Performance Avoidance	109	1.00	5.00	2.62	1.05
Mastery Approach	110	1.40	5.00	3.22	0.73
Overall School Climate	106	1.00	5.00	3.13	0.67
School Racial Climate	107	1.00	5.22	2.03	0.78

Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept is one's perception of his or her ability. Attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions held by the student about their academic skills contribute to the development of academic self-concept (Awad, 2007). Rosenberg (1979) argued that people base their actions and behaviors on self-perceptions. Thus, if a student does not feel confident in their academic ability his or her academic behaviors will reflect this lack of confidence. Academic self-concept has been found to be predictive of academic achievement (Marsh & Craven, 1997 as cited in Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2002).

One aim of the present study, was to ascertain if there were differences between lower level and upper level students and Black students and White students for academic self-concept. To achieve this aim, I used a modified version of the Perceived Competence Scale (Williams & Deci, 1996). Competence is considered a fundamental psychological need related to both goal attainment and task satisfaction and this scale helps measure how confident one is in his or her ability. The Perceived Competence Scale is a short, 4- item questionnaire. The items are listed in table five.

Table 12. Academic Self-Concept Items Descriptive Statistics (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$)

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
I feel confident in my ability to learn new material	110	2.00	5.00	3.93	1.15
I am capable of learning the material in all my classes	110	1.00	5.00	3.79	1.16
I feel able to meet the challenges of performing well in this school	110	1.00	5.00	3.90	1.09
I feel confident in my ability to do well in Honors and AP classes	110	1.00	5.00	3.18	1.34

Table 12 shows the four items in the academic self-concept scale. Responses ranged from *not at all true* to *very true* on a 5-point Likert scale. A high Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 shows the academic self-concept scale had a strong internal consistency which indicates that all four items are closely related and accurately measure the same construct. The responses show generally high self-confidence on most of the measures with the exception of the ability to do well in Honors and AP classes. The academic self-concept scale had a minimum score of 1.50 and a maximum score of 5.00 with a mean of 3.70 and a standard deviation of 0.97; with the first, second and third quartile with means of 2.75, 3.75 and 4.50 respectively.

The analyses showed upper level students ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.71$) had a more positive academic self-concept compared to the lower level students ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.91$). Female students also scored higher ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.85$) on the academic self-concept scale compared to male students ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.02$). Although females had higher academic self-concept means compared to males, Black females ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 0.88$) had lower academic self-concept compared to White females ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.53$) and White males ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.05$). However, Black females had higher scores than Black males ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.79$). Interestingly, the three (3) Black males in the upper level had much higher academic self-concept ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.14$) compared to the 32 Black males in the lower level ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.75$).

One goal of this study was to determine if gender, race or level predict academic self-concept. **Table 13** shows the model summary for the regression analysis. Standard multiple regression was conducted to predict participants' academic self-concept based on their gender, race and level. Regression results indicate that the overall model

significantly predicts academic self-concept, ($F(3,94) = 15.519$, $p = .000$), with an $R^2 = .331$. This model accounts for 33.1% of the variance in academic self-concept. White students scored half a point (.47) higher on academic self-concept than Black students. Upper level students scored .69 higher than lower level students on the academic self-concept scale. This means that White students in upper level scored 1.2 points higher than Black students in lower level.

Table 13. Summary of Standard Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Academic Self-Concept (N=97)

Model	B	Beta	t	p-value
(constant)	2.264		5.31	.000
Gender	-.187	-.099	-1.10	.274
Race	.470	.242	2.31	.023
Level	.691	.363	3.30	.001

Academic Motivation: Performance-Approach, Performance-Avoidance, and Mastery-Approach

Motivation is a central component of academic achievement (Covington, 2000); motivation is related to one's beliefs, values and goals (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Academic motivation can be thought of as what drives us to pursue academic challenges and achievement. According to Wigfield et al (2009), "achievement motivation refers more specifically to motivation relevant to performance on tasks in which standards of excellence are operative." Essentially, academic motivation is related to choice, persistence and effort (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006). This

study examined academic differences between students in lower leveled classes and students in upper leveled classes; one goal was to assess any differences in academic motivation.

This study looks at three types of academic motivation: performance approach, performance avoid and Mastery approach (Midgley, et al, 1998; Wolters, 2004; Wigfield, Eccles, Roeser, & Schiefele, 2009). The different motivation orientations can be viewed as “goals”, these goals are reasons why students exhibit certain academic behaviors. For example, a student may want to demonstrate his ability (performance approach), avoid looking incompetent (performance avoid), or to increase his level of competence (mastery approach) (Wolters, 2004).

In this study, the motivation was divided into three subscales to separately measure performance approach, performance avoid and mastery approach. These items were modified from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS) (Midgley et al, 2000). PALS students scales assess achievement goal orientations and achievement related beliefs, attitudes, and strategies. Each subscale is discussed below.

Performance-Approach Motivation

When students are performance approach oriented students are driven to demonstrate their competence. Students’ focus is self-demonstration of ability, students want to prove their “self- worth publicly” (Wolters, 2004). Performance goals have been associated with less adaptive patterns of learning behavior (Ames, 1992b); however, recent research argues that performance approach is not as detrimental as performance-avoidance and the two have been viewed as two separate orientations (Linnenbrink, 2005). Performance-approach orientation has been associated with one’s need for

extrinsic rewards and competition (Midgley et al, 1998). Students high in performance motivation care about the reward more so than mastering the actual task however, performance approach motivations has been associated with persistence and effort (Elliot, McGregor, and Gable, 1999).

Table 14 list the performance approach item means and standard deviations. The performance approach scale had an N of 110 and a minimum score of 1.00 and a maximum score of 5.00 ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.99$), with the first, second and third quartile with means of 2.00, 3.00 and 3.60 respectively. Responses ranged from *not at all true* to *very true* on a 5-point.

Overall, students were low on performance approach motivation. These results indicate that students in this sample were not significantly concerned with demonstrating their competence. However, upper level students had higher scores ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.02$) than lower level students ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.96$). There were no differences between White students ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.10$) and Black students ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .928$). Black females had lower performance approach score ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.87$) compared to White females ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.10$). Black males ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .948$) have higher performance-approach motivation as compared to Black females ($M = 2.63$, $SD = .874$).

Table 14. Performance-Approach Items Descriptive Statistics (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$)

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
I want to do better than other students in my classes.	110	1.00	5.00	3.24	1.46
I like to show my teachers that I'm smarter than the other students in my classes	110	1.00	5.00	2.50	1.41
Doing better than other students in school is important to me	110	1.00	5.00	2.66	1.47
It's important to me that other students in my class think that I am smart	110	1.00	5.00	2.67	1.47
I would feel really good if I were the only one who could answer the teacher's questions in class	110	1.00	5.00	3.33	1.55

Tables 15 shows the model summary for the performance-approach regression analysis. Standard multiple regression was conducted to predict participants' performance-approach motivation based on gender, race and level. Regression results indicate that the overall model does not significantly predict performance-approach, ($F(3,94) = 1.323$, $p = .271$), with an $R^2 = .041$. Neither gender, race nor level significantly predict performance-approach motivation.

Table 15. Summary of Standard Regression Analysis for Performance-Approach Motivation (N= 97)

Model	B	Beta	t	p-value
(constant)	1.991		3.732	.000
Gender	.362	.183	1.702	.092
Race	-.205	-.101	-.802	.424
Level	.400	.201	1.527	.130

Performance-Avoidance Motivation

Performance-avoidance orientation refers to motivation when the goal is to avoid looking incompetent. Students who display performance avoidance motivation are motivated to perform to avoid looking as if they lack ability or less able than their peers (Wolters, 2004). Among the motivation orientations, performance avoidance is considered the most maladaptive pattern of learning (Linnenbrink, 2005).

Performance-avoidance is considered maladaptive because of the potential for a student to engage in negative academic behaviors such as not putting forth effort or avoiding difficult task. Unfortunately, performance avoidance orientation can produce anxiety and task distraction (Elliot & Church, 1997). Research has found that anxiety can inhibit academic performance (Steele, 1992). Furthermore, performance avoidance orientation is detrimental because it has been associated with several negative behaviors such as effort withdrawal in the face of failure, decreased task enjoyment, preference for easy task, and the potential to attribute failure to lack of ability and not task difficulty (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996).

The performance-avoidance scale had an N of 110 and a minimum score of 1.00 and a maximum score of 5.00 ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.05$), with the first, second, third and fourth quartile with means of 1.66, 2.66, 3.50 and 3.60 respectively. **Table 16** provides means and standard deviations for each item used in the performance-avoidance sub-scale.

There were mean differences for performance-avoidance motivation. Black students ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.03$) had higher mean scores form performance-avoidance as compared to White students ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.04$). Male students ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.05$) were more performance-avoidant than female students ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.08$) and lower level students ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.98$) were more performance-avoidant than upper level students ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.13$).

Table 16. Performance-Avoidance Items Descriptive Statistics (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$)

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
One reason I do not participate in class is to avoid looking stupid	110	1.00	5.00	2.20	1.46
The reason I do my work is so others will not think I'm dumb	109	1.00	5.00	2.44	1.56
An important reason I do my class work is so that I don't embarrass myself	110	1.00	5.00	2.45	1.45
One of my main goals is to avoid looking like I can't do my work	110	1.00	5.00	2.61	1.58
The reason I do my classwork is so my teacher does not think I know less than other students in my class	110	1.00	5.00	2.92	1.47
It's very important to me that I don't look stupid in class	110	1.00	5.00	3.04	1.57

Tables 17 shows the model summary for the regression analysis of performance-avoidance motivation. Standard multiple regression was conducted to predict participants' performance-avoidance motivation based on their gender, race and level. Regression results indicate that the overall model does not significantly predict performance-avoidance motivation, ($F(3,94) = 2.224$, $p = .090$), with an $R^2 = .066$. None of the variables significantly contributed to the model.

Table 17. Summary of Standard Regression Analysis for Performance-Avoidance Motivation (N= 97)

Model	B	Beta	t	p-value
(constant)	3.189		5.654	.000
Gender	.125	.059	.557	.579
Race	-.515	-.236	-1.910	.059
Level	-.025	-.012	-.091	.927

Mastery-Approach Motivation

Unlike the performance goals, mastery approach is focused on the task; learning as much as possible and overcoming challenges (Wolters, 2004). Students who adopt this approach are not concerned with external rewards or status. Mastery approach is considered the most beneficial approach because it is related to adaptive self-regulatory processes such as persistence in the face of failure, task enjoyment, and positive attachment to the academic domain (Howell & Watson, 2006; Elliot & Church, 1997).

Whereas performance motivation is associated with self-presentation and normative referenced competence, mastery approach is not concerned with the perception of others (Harackiewicz et al, 2002). Mastery-approach has been associated with positive self-regulation and deep processing (Howell & Watson, 2007). Additionally, previous research has established a link between deep level processing (mastery learning) and positive academic achievement (Covington, 1992).

Another important distinction between performance approach and mastery approach is that students who adopt mastery approach are more likely to associate success with effort. More importantly students who adopt mastery approach recognize that failure is not an indicator of ability, but the need to pursue new learning strategies (Nicholls, 1984; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Elliot and Dweck (1988) argued that mastery goals are beneficial for all students but for low achieving students and those with low academic self-concept even more so. Students with low academic self-concept who are performance driven may display avoidance strategies to avoid looking incompetent. Mastery oriented students are focused on learning and improving their ability overtime thus they are insulated against negative behaviors such as fear of failure, withdrawal from challenges, and anxiety. Low achieving students may be mastery oriented because they are not focused on perceptions of their current ability (Elliot & Dweck, 1988).

Table 18 shows individual items for mastery-approach motivation. The mastery-approach scale had an N of 110 and a minimum score of 1.40 and a maximum score of 5.00 ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.73$), with the first, second, third and fourth quartile with means of 2.75, 3.20, 3.80 and 3.80 respectively. There were mean differences for mastery-approach motivation. Students in the lower levels ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.69$) had higher

mastery scores as compared to students in the upper levels ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.70$). Upper level Black males ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.21$) were more mastery oriented compared to lower level Black males ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .70$). Additionally, males ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.82$) were more mastery oriented as compared to females ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.57$).

Table 18. Mastery-Approach Items Descriptive Statistics (Cronbach's $\alpha = .55$)

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
I like school work that I'll learn from, even if I make a lot of mistakes	110	1.00	5.00	3.14	1.37
I like school work best when it really makes me think	110	1.00	5.00	3.08	1.30
An important reason why I do my school work is because I want to get better at the subject	110	1.00	5.00	3.75	1.33
If my school work is not interesting to me, it is more difficult for me to do the work	110	1.00	5.00	3.90	1.16
I like school work that I'll learn from, even if I will not make a good grade on the assignment	109	1.00	5.00	2.28	1.36

The model summary for the regression analysis of mastery-approach motivation is show in **Table 19**. Standard multiple regression was conducted to predict participants' mastery-approach motivation based on their gender, race and level. Regression results indicate that the overall model significantly predicts mastery-approach motivation, ($F(3,94) = 2.740$, $p = .048$), with an $R^2 = .080$. Neither gender, race, nor level significantly contributed to the model.

Table 19. Summary of Standard Regression Analysis for Mastery-Approach Motivation (N= 97)

Model	B	Beta	t	p-value
(constant)	2.820		10.023	.000
Gender	-.212	-.134	.196	.201
Race	-.628	-.386	-.437	.002
Level	.280	.177	-1.874	.174

School Climate

School climate is an essential component of a student's academic experience.

Research has shown a relationship between student academic performance and school climate (Johnson and Johnson, 1993). School climate is multidimensional and involves all stakeholders: teachers, students, administrators and parents. The school environment has several components including perceptions of the environment (Johnson, Johnson and Zimmerman, 1996), trust and respect for students and teachers (Manning & Saddlemire, 1996), safety (Frierberg, 1998) and quality of interactions between adults and students (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Blatt 2001).

A positive school climate has been associated with academic success and fewer disciplinary issues (Marshal, 2004). Previous research posits that positive school climate factors insulate the most vulnerable and at risk students from maladaptive learning strategies by providing them with a supportive learning environment (Haynes and Comer, 1993; Haynes, 1998). A major factor of school climate is school policies and structures.

The overall school climate survey items were modified from the Cube Urban School Climate survey and measured students' perception of trust, fairness and respect, feelings about school and students' perceptions of teacher caring (Perkins, 2006). The school climate scale had an N of 109 and a minimum score of 1.00 and a maximum score of 5.00 ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.67$), with the first, second, third and fourth quartile with means of 2.62, 3.12, 3.62 and 3.75 respectively. The school climate had high internal consistency with an alpha of .80. Students were asked to respond to the school climate items on a 5 point Likert scale *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

Black students had a more positive perception of school climate ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.65$) as compared to White students ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.65$). Students in lower level had higher school climate scores ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.63$) than students in upper levels ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.69$). Interestingly, White upper level students ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.67$) had a more negative perception of school climate as compare to Black upper level students ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.66$). **Table 20** shows the descriptive statistics for each school climate item.

Table 20. School Climate Items Descriptive Statistics (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$)

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
At my school teachers respect the students	110	1.00	5.00	3.42	0.94
At my school students trust the teachers	110	1.00	5.00	2.83	0.90
I enjoy learning at my school	109	1.00	5.00	3.33	1.05
I look forward to coming to school	109	1.00	5.00	2.92	1.19
My teachers make me feel good about myself	110	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.02
My teachers care whether I am successful or not	109	1.00	5.00	3.70	0.95
Teachers are fair to everyone	109	1.00	5.00	2.72	1.19
At my school students get bullied	110	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.11

Table 21 shows the model summary for the school climate regression analysis.

Standard multiple regression was conducted to predict participants' perception of school climate based on their gender, race or level. Regression results indicate that the overall model significantly predicts school climate, ($F(3,90) = 2.765$, $p = .046$), with an $R^2 = .084$. Neither gender, race nor level significantly contributed to the model.

Table 21. Summary of Standard Regression Analysis for School Climate (N= 93)

Model	B	Beta	t	p-value
(constant)	3.577		9.518	.000
Gender	.081	.060	.550	.584
Race	-.315	-.229	-1.853	.067
Level	-.091	-.067	-.513	.609

Racial Climate

Racial school climate is a subcomponent of the overall school climate. Racial climate examines the perceived discrimination and prejudice experienced by students in the academic environment. Racial discrimination and prejudice has been associated with maladaptive behaviors of minority students (Fleming, 1984; Hurtado, 1992, 1994; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Smedley, Myers, & Harrel, 1993). Discrimination and prejudice are associated with psychological distress that can lead to low academic achievement ((Mufioz, 1987; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Positive racial climate is associated with higher student achievement and fewer disciplinary issues and race was found to be a moderator (Mattison & Aber, 2007).

Racial school climate examines how race and perceptions of race matter in schooling (Cabrera et al, 1999). Studies on racial climate assess fairness and equal treatment of Black and White students. In a negative racial climate students report high level of prejudice and discrimination. A negative racial school climate has been found to hinder academic performance (Cabrera et al, 1999).

The racial school climate measure assessed the degree students feel that they are treated differently because of their race or ethnicity. It also evaluates students' perception of their interactions with other students of different race. Perceived discrimination will be measured with the School Discrimination Scale (see Eccles, Wong, & Peck, 2006 and Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003) and the Cube Urban School Climate Survey (Perkins, 2006).

The racial school climate scale had an N of 107 and a minimum score of 1.00 and a maximum score of 5.22 ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 0.78$), with the first, second, third and fourth quartile with means of 1.44, 1.88, 2.44 and 2.55 respectively. There were mean differences for the racial school climate scale. Black students had a more negative perception of school climate ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 0.85$) as compared to White students ($M = 1.77$, $SD = 0.59$). Black female students ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.91$) also scored the racial climate more negatively as compared to Black male students ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.11$) and White female students ($M = 1.77$, $SD = 0.50$). **Table 22** shows the racial school climate survey items.

Table 22. Racial School Climate Items Descriptive Statistics (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$)

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
At school, how often do you feel that teachers call on you less often than they call on other students because of your race	110	1.00	6.00	1.62	1.05
Teachers grade you harder than other students because of your race	110	1.00	6.00	1.55	1.07
You get disciplined more harshly by teachers than other students because of your race	110	1.00	6.00	1.98	1.65
In your school, how often is there racial tension between students of different racial backgrounds	110	1.00	6.00	2.97	1.39
Students who are not of my race generally do better in school than I do	109	1.00	5.00	2.66	1.18
How often do you feel that you get in fights with some kids because of your race	109	1.00	6.00	1.66	1.23
How often do you feel that you are not picked for certain teams or other school activities because of your race	108	1.00	6.00	1.66	1.19
There is little you can do to avoid racial discrimination at school	107	1.00	5.00	2.3	1.29

Tables 23 shows the model summary for the racial school climate regression analysis. Standard multiple regression was conducted to predict participants' perception of racial climate based on their gender, race or level. Regression results indicate that the overall model significantly predicts school climate, ($F(3,90) = 2.765$, $p = .046$), with an $R^2 = .084$. Race was the only variable that significantly contributed to the model. White students score decreases by $-.63$ points on the racial school climate scale.

Table 23. Summary of Standard Regression Analysis for Racial School Climate (N= 94)

Model	B	Beta	t	p-value
(constant)	2.820		6.814	.000
Gender	-.212	-.134	-1.287	.201
Race	-.628	-.386	-3.134	.002
Level	.280	.177	1.370	.174

Correlations

Spearman rho correlation coefficients were calculated to determine relationships among all six scales and academic level (lower and upper). A relationship was found between academic self-concept and performance-avoidance ($r(108) = -.19, p = .04$); as academic self-concept increased performance avoidance decreased. As students became more confident in their ability the less they pursued avoidance strategies. Additionally, as academic self-concept increased mastery approach decreased ($r(105) = -.23, p = .01$). Students who had more positive self-concept had less motivation to learn as much as possible for the sake of learning. Furthermore, an increase in performance approach motivation increases performance avoidance ($r(108) = .42, p = .00$). Both performance approach motivation and performance-avoidance motivation are focused on demonstration of ability, while with mastery approach motivation the goal is focused on mastering a task not the demonstration of competence.

Furthermore, when students had a negative perception of the racial climate, academic self-concept decreased ($r(5) = -.19, p = .04$). However, a positive school climate decreased the negative perception of the racial climate ($r(101) = -.24, p = .01$). A positive school climate also increased student mastery approach motivation ($r(104) = .28, p = .00$). Students with higher mastery approach scores tended to report higher ratings of school climate.

Students with a more positive perception of the school climate were in the upper level ($r(104) = -.19, p = .04$). As school climate scores increased student level decreased. On the other hand as student's level increased, academic self-concept scores also increased, ($r(108) = .53, p = .00$). Student level was also correlated with mastery approach motivation, ($r(108) = -.309, p = .00$). As mastery approach motivation increased, student level decreased, thus higher mastery motivation tended to be related with lower student level.

Summary

The survey results suggest that there are several significant differences for academic self-concept, motivation and school climate. Black students and lower level students had lower academic self-concept as compared to White students and upper level students. Students with low academic self-concept have more negative perceptions of their academic ability. The Black students and the lower level students in this sample may be less likely to feel confident in their ability to do well on challenging academic task.

There were no differences found for performance-approach motivation or performance-avoid motivation. However, Black students had higher performance-

avoidance mean scores as compared to White students. Interestingly, significant differences were found for mastery-approach motivation, but neither race, gender, nor level significantly contributed to the overall model. Mean score differences were found level. Lower level students had higher mastery-approach mean score as compared to the upper level students.

Gender, race and level significantly predicted school climate. Surprisingly, there were not significant differences for perception of school climate between the lower level and the upper level. Black students had slightly higher mean scores as compared to White students, however Black students had a more negative perception of the racial school climate. Significant differences were found on the racial school climate scale.

The correlations suggest several significant relationships. These relationships are important aspects of a student's academic experience. For example, a positive academic self-concept decreases performance-avoidance motivation. Furthermore, students who gave higher ratings of school climate gave lower ratings for negative racial climate. Students in the lower level had more negative perception of school climate and lower scores for academic self-concept.

Further analysis of individual items revealed some interesting findings (See individual item percentages in Appendix D). These results suggest that leveling influence academic self-concept of ninth grade students. Specifically, students who are in the upper level have a more positive perception of their academic capacity. Upper level students are more confident in their ability to do well in school and their ability to do well in honors and AP classes. Additionally, Black students have lower academic self-concept compared to White students.

Furthermore, 20% of Black students reported that they did not feel confident (usually not true) that they could do well in honors or AP classes; only 1.8% of Black students reported “very true.” When students were asked to respond to the statement, *Doing better than other students in school is important to me*, 57.9% of lower level Black females responded “not at all true”.

14.5% of all students reported “very true” to the statement, *it’s important to me that other students in my classes think I am smart*; while 36.4% students responded “not at all true” and 29.1% students responded “somewhat true.” 13.6% of Black students and 7.3% White students responded “not at all true” to the statement *I want to do better than other students in my classes*. Overall, Students were not high on performance approach motivation.

Overall, students were low in performance-avoidance motivation. However, 44.7% of lower level Black males responded “very true” to the statement *It’s very important to me that I don’t look stupid in class*. Students high in mastery approach motivation are motivated to overcome challenges and learn new material because they like learning new things. 24% of all students in this sample reported “very true” to the statement *I like school work that I will learn from even if I make a lot of mistakes* and 21% of all students who reported “very true” to *I like school work that I will learn from even if I make a lot of mistakes* were Black.

I expected lower level students to score higher on the item *if my school work is not interesting to me it is more difficult for me to do the work*; 31% of lower level students reported “very true” compared to upper level students (16%). Additionally, 19%

of females who responded “very true” were Black compared to 25% White females; 24% of Black males responded “very true” compared to 14% of White males.

When students were asked to respond to the statement, *I enjoy learning at my school*, 66% of lower level students responded “agree” or “strongly agree” and only 37% of upper level students responded similarly. 70% of lower level Black students and 68% of all Black students responded “agree” or “strongly agree”. Upper level students were more likely to report that they did not enjoy learning at school. A total of 9.2 % of students responded strongly disagree to the statement *students trust teachers* and 19.3% responded Agree. Lower level male students appeared to disagree with this statement more than the other students.

Only 13% of Black students in the upper level agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, *My teachers care whether I am successful or not* compared to 66% of lower level Black students. 19.4% of all students agreed with the statement *my teachers care whether I’m successful or not*.

The racial school climate scale asked students about their experiences with discrimination at school. Students were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, *Students who are not of my race (or ethnicity) generally do better in school than I do*; 42% of Black lower level students agreed or strongly agreed, and 47% of all Black students “agreed or strongly agreed.”

31.4% of all Black students reported sometimes to *how often is there is racial tension in your school between students of different racial backgrounds* compared to 27.8% of White students. 22% of all respondents responded that there was racial tension

between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds *occasionally*. Students were asked to explain why they felt there was racial tension in their school; an upper level Black student explained, *they think that race defines how smart you are and what level you're in*. A Black lower level student wrote, *"Black/African American students are not treated the same or equally as White students"*. Another lower level Black student wrote, *"When a Black kids does something wrong it is an automatic punishment but when a White kid does something wrong it is a warning"*. A lower level White student responded, *"Mainly jokes, nothing terrible"* and an upper level White student stated, *sometimes it happens as a joke"*.

Chapter 8: School Climate, Racialized Environments and Ability Grouping

“If I had stayed at the school, I don’t think I would be where I am today”- Jason, former student at PHS

Jason was an exceptional young man, who recently graduated from a prestigious university. Currently, he is back in his hometown to run for city council, one of the youngest people to ever run for the seat. The first time I met him, he was a tenth grade student. Even then I knew that he had great potential. As a teenager he was articulate, charming, witty and intelligent. Thus, I was very surprised to hear that when he was at PHS he was in all lower level classes. Consequently, his mother took him out of the school and sent him to less diverse, majority Black school in a nearby city.

Although this city did not have a great reputation overall for education, he was able to get into a magnet school. At his new school he thrived; he was well liked by teachers and peers. When he graduated he had several offers and scholarships from prestigious schools across the country. He really liked PHS, and although he knew he should not be in level 2 classes, he did not want to leave his friends. He thought that the school was a good school, especially since it had a diverse population and it was in a good neighborhood.

I tried to get out of level 2 classes, my mom met with my teachers, counselors and administration to insist that I be removed from level 2. They would not budge. They pretty much have most Black boys in low level and remedial classes in junior high school and those carryover to high school. My mom knew that I should not be in level 2 classes so she made me leave the school. I was very upset in the beginning, I didn’t want to leave all of my friends and I thought PHS was a better school. The reason my mother sent me to the school in the first place was because it was a school in a nice middle class community. But, now I am so grateful to my mother, if I had stayed I would not have had the same opportunities and I would not be where I am today. I was not being prepared for college. - Jason

Unfortunately, Jason may be correct, if he had stayed at PHS, he may not have enrolled or graduated from college. There is a gap for post-secondary enrollment for Black and White students at PHS. The state school performance report showed that for the 2012-2013 school year, only 66% of Black students enrolled in a 4-year college as compared to 92.8% of White students. At the high school level there are also gaps in percentage of students taking advanced level courses. According to the State of the District report issued by the school district, only 9% of Black students took AP classes as compared to 41% of White students. The district addressed the AP gap in the Five Year Strategic Plan:

Because of enrollment in Advance Placement classes correlated highly with success in post-secondary schooling, by 2016, PHS students will show improved academic achievement by increasing the proportion of Black students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. The rate of participation of Black students will increase by 50% over a five-year period.

A Black-White gap also exist on achievement test across the district from elementary through high school. In 2012-2013 only 67.9% of all Black students scored proficient or advanced proficient compared to 95.9% of all White students on the Math assessment. 69.2% of all Black students scored proficient or advanced proficient compared to 93.8% of all White students on the Language Arts assessment. The state assessment test are measurements of student achievement in language arts literacy and Math. Students are tested in grade 3-8 and in the 11th grade. The high school state assessment exam is given in eleventh grade and it is a graduation requirement. If a student does not score proficient on the exam he will not receive a high school diploma.

These data from the school performance report show that there are racial disparities in the district; the underperforming students are not being prepared to do well on state exams or for post-secondary education.

Community and District Response: Understanding the Racial Climate

The goal of this research is to describe racialized environments and how these environments are related to academic self-concept, motivation and subsequently academic achievement. The district has stated that its vision 2016 is “Understanding and Using out Diverse Community as an Asset and Strength”. These statements suggest that the district identifies itself as one that is diverse. Its mission is

To prepare each and every student, regardless of demographic or socioeconomic background for postsecondary educational success, and to educate all students to be responsible and productive members of the global society at large...

PHS has declared that it will prepare all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, for postsecondary educational success. However, currently this is not the case. Data from the School Performance Report shows that only 66% of Black PHS graduates enroll in a 4-year college/university after graduation. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse shows that in 2005, approximately one in five Black students graduate from college as compared to one in two White students. Furthermore, only 83% of Black students graduated PHS high school with a regular high school diploma in four years, as compared to 98% of White students. This suggest that some Black students are repeating grades (most often the ninth grade) or dropping out.

Although 83% is relatively high compared to the state target, which is 75%, is quite troublesome in comparison to the 98% for White students in the same school.

Even more egregious is that only 9% of Black students are taking AP classes, although they make up 51% of the school population.

This type of disproportionate racial ability grouping creates a racialized environment. A racialized environment is one that is created by the focus on race and is contextualized in term of race. The district has created a mission geared towards improving Black student achievement. The district objectives as stated in the strategic plan are:

- By 2016, PHS will reduce the disparities between Black and White students in demonstrating proficiency on state assessments by 80%
- By 2016, PHS will reduce the disparities between Black and White student in demonstrating *advanced proficiency* on state assessments by 20%

The district created a task force to address the achievement gap at the school with a focus on Black students' low achievement. Although it is reasonable to assume that the district is not intentionally labeling all Black students as low achievers, the representation of test scores and other data at school board meetings, staff meetings and community meetings depicts Black students in the district as low achievers.

Not only was the data being presented on Black students as low achievers as compared to White students in the district, but there was a narrative around Black students as lazy, poor and deficient. This study is not suggesting that the district is fabricating racial differences in academic achievement or outcomes, however this study suggest that because Black students are depicted and stereotyped as low achieving it creates an identity as low ability, and Black students are targeted as the problem and cause of the academic gaps. Thus, racialized ability grouping is justified and maintained. For example, at several board meetings discussing the leveling system. The achievement

gap was highlighted as a significant problem. The Board presented charts and graphs depicting the racial gap on the state proficiency exam

This incites arguments and speculation as to why Black students were not doing well. These arguments centered on innate or environmental causes. Unfortunately, the depiction of Black students as “low achievers” allowed for underperformance to be attributed to a lack of ability or more politically correct attribution, their home environment or culture. This sentiment was expressed often in the local newspaper as exhibited in this one letter to the editor,

There is no evidence in our schools of systematic discrimination against Black children. Yet the “achievement gap” is present in third grade, when we first measure it in our district, it no doubt would be present in preschool, if we cared to measure it at that early age. ...That Black children, on average, don’t do as well as White children in school owes to various cultural reasons by now well known, but unpleasant to acknowledge and discuss. This underachievement is not easily or entirely remediable by the schools. - White male parent in the district

Another parent wrote,

Excellence is not an inalienable right. It is achieved not endowed. Celebrating our diversity at the expense of our competitiveness will doom our kids to frustration and failure....Yes, there are achievement-gap issues that need to be addressed. However, many of these stem from a variety of factors that are outside the purview of the school. These include the home, parental involvement, role models, peer groups and so on. – White male parent in the district.

These arguments by some in the district exemplify the belief that ability and achievement, specifically the low achievement of Black students in the district were due to factors outside of the school. It is also important to note that these parents believed their children will suffer if the school attempts to address the achievement gap by integrating classrooms.

In 2008, a community task force collected data from parents concerning the leveling (ability grouping) system and created a report that was distributed at the school board meeting. It reported that White parents were more satisfied with the leveling system than Black parents. The survey results indicated that Black community members reported significantly lower level of satisfaction with the leveling system than Whites, and Black parents had a greater number of instances in which no change in level as a result of their attempt to get their child's level changed. Data from the leveling survey in 2008, led to several suggestions; however, the overarching recommendation was that "the ability grouping program known as Leveling should be eliminated".

Another report was distributed in 2010 that provided research in support of de-leveling. This report revealed that high achieving students were not disadvantaged by being in integrated classrooms (Boaler & Staples, 2008), and that differentiated instruction was beneficial to all students' especially gifted students (Doocy-Curry, 1999). Additionally, it was concluded that engaging enrichment classes were beneficial to disengaged learners, because of the inductive and investigative pedagogy (Renzulli cited in the 2010 report). The 2008 report recommended:

We recognize that eliminating levels in our district could be traumatic, if done without a plan and/or buy-in from teachers and the community. However, our primary concern is that the District will continue its historic pattern of operating within its "comfort zone" and limiting reform efforts to what it assumes (without concrete data) the community will accept.

Thus, [we] believes that if the PHS School District is to meet the goal of eliminating the achievement gap between White students and students of color, students of low socio-economic status and those in special education, all students must be given the opportunity to have access to the most rigorous dynamic and interactive curriculum possible.

It is important to note that not all White parents were for leveling nor all Black parents against leveling. Black parents wanted the same thing as White parents, they wanted their children to have rigorous curriculum and for teachers to have high expectations of their children. Black parents, in the United for Academic Excellence task force, put together a vision statement for the district. It stated,

Combining multiple levels into a single, rigorous grade-level class, where everyone develops strong skills, moves our district toward the equity mission.—
Parents group policy recommendations

During several board meetings, tensions rose and tempers flared, one particular incident was very memorable. Several former students of PHS attended the meeting to voice their concerns and condemnation of levels, one White male student created quite a frenzy when he stated that the leveling system at PHS was a result of “*White privilege*” and “*White supremacy*”. This caused a very vocal White parent, in favor of leveling, yelled “*that’s not true!*” He eventually also wrote a letter to the editor demanding an apology,

Indeed, the statement was so absurd that it could just be ignored if it were not giving frank expression of a suspicion that, coming in different degrees, seems to underlie a lot recent statements in favor of de-leveling. The suspicion which is highly offensive, is evidently that most teachers involved in the level-recommendations in our district including African American teachers?—are racist, as if the culture were that of Georgia in the 1950’s with many active Klan groups, rather than the unusually tolerant and integrated community we know it to be, and for which we moved here.

This parent’s statement identifies an important idea about racism “*as if the culture were that of Georgia in the 1950’s*”; the belief that racism primarily occurs in the Southern states and is less customary in modern society is prevalent and problematic. This belief becomes even more pervasive in places that are viewed as “diverse” and “tolerant.”

Many parents such as this one, felt that the achievement gap at the school could not be due to “racist” policies and to call it such is in itself racist,

When someone holds and expresses a judgment that is so divisive and utterly unfair on the basis of no evidence other than a total inability to recognize the complex cause of a problem----like the racial achievement gap that sociologists have been studying for decades---they deserve some response, though almost no one protested at the BOE meetings. The statement was itself highly racist.

This parent did not want to be labeled as racist, because he was in favor of leveling. However, he felt that this is exactly what was happening. Often the discussion over leveling would become racialized, although people resisted the idea that it was “racial”. The data was used to show a “racial gap” between Black and White students and there was continuing debate on why there was a racial gap. As the letters to the editor show, some people believed that the Black students’ lack of achievement were cultural and/or innate. There was also a belief that integration or de-leveling would create less rigorous classes and put their children at a disadvantage and that eventually high ability students would leave the district in search for more rigorous and competitive high schools as one parent pointed out,

Against this backdrop of ever-fiercer global competition, it’s hard to imagine how this deleveling plan, which will dilute the classroom, will in any way serve to produce the brighter, smarter students of tomorrow. In this global marketplace, our schools need to be seen as competitive on the world stage; fabricating categories like “the top performing diverse suburban school in the nation”. Just so we can appear to be the best in some category. Will fool no one....

The bottom line is that it’s an unsympathetic, competitive world out there, and we are deluding ourselves if we think that we can foster excellence with a myopic educational strategy that places kids of vastly different capabilities in the same classroom, just so some can feel better. I’m rather inclined to believe that what will happen is the brightest students will never reach their potential while the academically challenged will become even more disenfranchised.

Inevitably, the parents of the high achievers will, as many have already done, abandon our schools for private alternatives or flee for other towns whose schools still insist on challenging students based upon their abilities.

This letter addressed several issues. However, the main premise was that the students in level 2 are there because they lack ability and potential and undoubtedly if these “low achieving” students are forced to be in class with the high achieving students the class will lose rigor and the school will lose status as a competitive high achieving high school. These students in the lower levels are perceived as being incapable of meeting high academic standards. There is also a belief that the students in the lower levels and students in advanced levels have “vastly different capabilities.”

“Race permeates every space of this institution,” Mr. Kline, A White male teacher in the History department, snarled at me one day after a faculty meeting. He was furious. He believed race was a driving force behind most of the policies and decisions at the school. He is an ardent advocate of de-leveling. When I probed him on why he would make that statement, he explained that he believes that the school’s leveling policy was created and sustained to maintain racial segregation at the school; because the school’s student body is majority Black, the strict leveling policy helps attract White parents and keeps White parents in the school. He believed that if the school was de-leveled, many of the remaining White parents would pull their students from the school. At several board meetings, I observed a number of angry White parents who made it very clear that they would leave the district if the school de-leveled. Also in letters to the editor White parents declared, *“Inevitably, the parents of the high achievers will, as many have*

already done, abandon our schools for private alternatives or flee for other towns whose schools still insist on challenging students based upon their abilities.”

A Black female teacher in the History department, Mrs. Cox, often discussed with her students the racial divide at the school. She presented her class with school data on test scores and showed documentaries on the achievement gap in America and connected this information to what was happening at PHS. She believed that the leveling system was maintained because the school was a majority Black school in a majority White town, “There is a belief in this country that back schools are bad schools”. She also agreed with Mr. Kline that the district maintained the leveling policy to pacify White parents, *“They don’t care about these Black kids, and they want to keep these White people happy so that they don’t run to the private schools.”* There is an underlying assumption that level accurately depicts ability. If you are in the lower level you are there because you are of low ability. Many of the anti-leveling proponents argued that the system was not based on actual ability but a perception of ability and behavior.

Others argued that the students were in lower levels because they were lazy or lack motivation and desire to be successful. The teachers who fought to keep Advanced Placement exclusive did not want to see it opened to all students. They believed only “elite” students should have the opportunity to take AP courses. A teacher in a faculty meeting commented, “I do not believe that all students should be allowed to take our advanced classes, these classes should be reserved for our elite students.” Some teachers believe that ability is fixed or fixed intelligence, in the faculty meeting for departmental supervisors, one supervisor stated, *“There are dumb students and smart students.”*

Teachers and administrators who were against leveling were just as adamant that it was wrong and harmful as those who were for it were adamant that it was beneficial and necessary.

The arguments against leveling were based on the tenets that all students have the capacity to be high achievers if they are challenged and supported academically and socially. Teachers against leveling believed that student placement in levels are based on subjective measures and not ability. Mr. Kline told me that many of the students are placed in levels based on behavior and whether a teacher perceived a student to have academic potential. Placement was not based on actual ability. This was further substantiated by the fact that Mrs. Hill showed me her student demographics and some students in her lower level class had test scores similar to her students in her honors class.

Perceptions of student ability seemed to be related to student behavior. In the academic setting, behavior appears to be the most important criteria of ability grouping, not ability. Mrs. Cox revealed to me that one of the first things that most teachers look at when making recommendation is the student's behavior. She said, "How a teacher perceives a student and if teachers like a student influences how the student is placed." Black students, also reported that they felt as if they were being judged for being Black,

You know, there are good African Americans and there are some that are bad, but usually when they [teachers] see the ones that are bad, they think the ones that are good are also bad, that's just what they expect (Denton, lower level Black male)

Many stakeholders in the district, particularly Black parents and Black teachers believed that the ability grouping policy is determined on the basis of race. The perception of students can influence pedagogy, expectations, and even teacher-student

interactions. There is the perception of “teenagers being teenagers”; however, the perception of students in the lower level goes beyond that. Some teachers believe that these students are different from the normal teenager. Mrs. Hill told me, “*They lack impulse control.*” At a teacher’s meeting designed to discuss intervention and referral services for at risk students, several teachers stated that the students were lazy and lacked respect for teacher or their education. Many teachers felt that the students did not care if they did well or if they failed. They believed the issues were embedded in the students, not their lack of pedagogical knowledge or classroom management.

Teacher interviews revealed that those who favored leveling favor it for a few different reasons. First they believe that ability grouping allows the school to maintain rigor in honors and advanced classes. Many leveling advocates felt that students at the lower levels were not capable of academic rigor; and did not have the capacity to meet the challenges of a rigorous course. In the same vein, many of those in favor of leveling also believed that students in the lower level were not motivated, “they are lazy and they don’t care”. Others believe that students who are currently in the lower level have not been adequately prepared to succeed in more challenging classes, and putting them in more advanced classes was setting them up for failure.

There was a consensus that there was a lack of parental involvement. In one faculty meeting, it was mentioned that many of the “at risk” students do not live with their parents. In fact, there was a discussion of one student at length in the student disciplinary committee meeting; apparently he was a foster child and he was always in and out of trouble. However, there seemed to be little sympathy for his situation. A Black biology teacher commented, “*he lives all over the place and we are financing his*

education...He is not a nice kid, I can see why he gets kicked out of foster homes, he is not a nice person.” A White male teacher remarked that they should consider a student’s situation and try to be understanding and helpful, but several teachers felt like that was not their job. The Black biology teacher said, “these students [Black students] care too much about whether a teacher likes them or not”. Observations of several lower level classes revealed that teachers often struggled with having negative perceptions of their students and consequently lowered expectations. Mrs. Hill commented that the students in her level 2 class “*were unmotivated and out of control*” and were very “*immature*”. She said she struggled with the question “*is it me or them*”, she admitted that she should have higher expectations of them.

Although it was a perception that many of the lower level and Black students come from single family or low income homes, this was not the case. In fact, almost 30% of Black mothers and fathers have a college degree. Approximately, 12% have a graduate or professional degree and the overall poverty rate in the district is less than 3%.

The leveling argument is racialized, it is well known that the students at the lower levels were Black. Thus, when there was a discussion of low ability students, the discussion was about Black students. Brown (1993) describes the social and educational environments of African-Americans, “African-Americans live in a society where common ‘knowledge’ about Blacks plays a central role in the dominant American socio-historical experience. In the dominant American culture, this history produces a socially constructed category for African-Americans with particularly negative connotations. Black people occupy a social category where its inhabitants are perceived as poor, lazy, lustful, ignorant, and prone to criminal behavior” (p. 819).

Current research reveals that most Whites reject overt and blatant forms of discrimination, but are less likely to show positive attitudes and behaviors towards Black people (Brown, 1993). It is reasonable to believe that residents of the PHS community would never say or support any racist speak or ideology, they may participate in covert racial microaggressions, as such that arise when people feel threatened, as with de-leveling.

Racial Climate: Level 4 = White = Smart

School racial Climate has been studied at the college level (Carroll 1998; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado et al, 1999; Long, 2011) to better understand college access, persistence and graduation rates. These studies have shown that a positive racial climate is one that has (a) the inclusion of students, faculty, and administrators of color;(b) a curriculum that reflects the historical and contemporary experiences of people of color; (c) programs to support the recruitment, retention and graduation of students of color; and (d) a school mission that reinforces the institution's commitment to pluralism.

Perceptions of Black students as “the problem” extended to students and teachers at PHS. There were students, including Black students who had negative perceptions of Black students. Many students, even Black students, had negative things to say about Black students. Many believed that these students come from “bad homes” with parents who do not care about their education. When I Black level 2 students claimed that the reason Black students were underperforming was because the Black students have parents that don’t care, I probed them about their family and upbringing, and all of them said their parents cared about their education and even pushed them to do well. I then pressed them to think about why they are still in the lower level and if they really believed that the reason was because “parents don’t care”, or the “Black kids don’t care”

or “they are lazy.” Many of the students could not give me an answer. When I asked ninth grade students why there were more Black students in the lower level as compared to the upper level, I received interesting responses. Keisha a lower level Black female responded,

There are more White kids because of their parents, parents don’t accept lower grades. My parents push my sister do better. But not me, because I didn’t do well when I was younger and I didn’t really care about school

Me: so you still do not care about school?

Keisha: I care now

Me: Why didn’t you care about school when you were younger?

Keisha: I don’t know...um, I think it was because I didn’t read so good. Now I care, but I think it’s too late.

Then Andrew, a White male level 4 student commented,

Umm probably like the attitudes of the kids and the teachers, like in non-leveled classes like gym and stuff you can kind of see the difference, like usually the high level classes the kids like care a little more about their grades and in the lower levels they don’t usually care about their grades.

Me: why do you think they care more in the honors?

Andrew: I don’t know why

The perception of Black students as lacking in ability was salient and pervasive. Research has shown that Black students’ experience of being seen as inferior academically is often expressed as microaggressions the educational setting (Solarzona & Ceja, 2000). School racial climate is the interaction between different races and the messages given and received about race, diversity and culture (Chauvos et al, 2008; Chang & Le, 2010). While walking down the hallway, I would see a colorful display of diversity. Students of many different ethnicities and income levels. However, once the hallways are clear and you step into a classroom you get a different picture. PHS

students are well aware of the racial divide and the perceptions associated with each level. Tricia, a self-identified, mixed race student explained it to me this way,

It's been like that for a while so I guess I'm kinda use to it. It is kinda like an elephant in the room sometimes because when you see other classes, lower level classes mostly Black kids, upper is White kids, like everyone kind of knows it, but no one ever says anything.

Me: How do students at this school view lower level students vs. upper level students?

Tricia: I think Black kids kinda think you are White if you are in a level 4, and if you are White in a level 2 they think you are more Black.

A high achieving Black female, Tina, described it as a “natural” separation,

Its split up race wise, but I noticed that the lower grades [9th grade] are more split up than the 12th grade classes. It's not intentional, obviously, but you can see the natural like split between Whites and Blacks...like in the classroom, because usually the White kids are in the upper level, it was really weird for me in my upper level classes, because there were a few Black people in my classes. I was like the only one.

The racial segregation was very difficult for honors level Black students because often they were only a few Black students in the class and Black students found this experience to be very isolating. Some Black students also experienced anxiety around academic discussions of race or when there were group assignments. Chad, a high achieving Black male student revealed to me, *“it kinda feels weird when they talk about racism and stuff, I never know what to say”*. Black students expressed that they do not want to be the representative of the entire Black race, but they do want their voice heard and opinions respected, Tina reflected, *“It's hard to express your opinion, I feel like they won't get it, they won't truly understand where I'm coming from.”* She also revealed that she feels

uncomfortable around the language used by the White students, *“There are the Black jokes you feel like a pet”*.

Sarah, another Black honors female students described the discomfort she feels when they are forced to work in a group,

You feel like an oddball when you give your opinion... comfort not there. If I have to get in a group, the only way I would get in a group if the teachers puts us together... If we need help, we can get help from other Black students and the teacher.

Sarah’s predicament, was quite unsettling, sadly many Black students felt alienated from their White classmates in advanced classes. Tammy, a Black female told me about a situation that happened in an honors class. Students were allowed to pick their own groups and the seating arrangement was based on the groups. She said that she and the three other Black students formed a group, but towards the end of the class period the teacher pulled them out of the class to tell them that they should split up so the groups would be diverse. Tammy felt very upset about this, *“I did not understand why she singled us out, why we had to split up and none of the White groups were asked to split up. She could have made one of the White students join our group.”*

The Black honors students expressed that they felt that they were over looked by their peers and sometimes their teachers. Tammy explained to me that she often feels as if the White students receive more attention from the teacher,

Yea, like the White students they like focus on them...like help them more. Like, I realized in one of my classes on the other side of the room was mostly White and they were being helped and everything, but we needed help too, and on the other side, it was me and my friends and he was taking forever to get to us and we would raise our hands and he would say, I will be right there, but he never came.

Black students in honors classes experienced feelings of isolation and exclusion in their classes. Several Black honors students told me that they feel as if they have to prove that they belong in the class. Tony, an honors Black male student expressed his feeling of exclusion, *“I walked in and looked around and saw I was the only Black male. I felt that I had to prove that I belong”*. Tammy explained how she felt in her advanced Math class

I felt like I didn’t deserve to be in it [honors], but I didn’t know why I felt this way, because I took the test to get in like everyone else...at the end of the year I felt that the teacher finally respected me because I didn’t think he did at all.

Sarah, an upper level Black female had this to say, *“most of them (level 2 students) that I see, It’s not like they are dumb, but they play around a lot.”* When asked, *“How does the fact that there are more Blacks in level 2 influence your interactions with other Black students?”* She said,

I still associate with them, if they are not bad students who like to get in trouble, it doesn’t really make a difference, and sometimes I will ask them for help on something that I am just not understanding and they will be able to help me. So it’s not like I feel like they are lower than me.

Black students in level 2 classes also felt the onus of being perceived as lacking ability. One day as I was sitting in the office of Dr. Jones, the vice principal, a level 2 Black female came in to the office, she was very frustrated, upset and near tears. She proclaimed, *“they talk to us like we are dumb...my teacher sad ‘this is a book’ ‘Do you know what a book is?’ ‘Why would she say this? Of course I know what a book is, I’m not stupid.’”* Perhaps the teacher was being facetious or sarcastic, but the student took it as a very real personal attack on her intelligence. Several students commented on the perception or expectations of Black students’ lower intelligence or academic ability. The Black students in level 2 are aware that they are viewed as less competent and less

intelligent than students in the upper level. One lower level student commented, *"I think we are viewed as not as smart."* My interviews and discussions with other Black students supported the feeling that Black students and lower level students are perceived as less intelligent and academically competent,

I just notice it, if like a White student, they automatically think they are smart, but a Black student, because of the way they talk or dress they automatically think...they don't think they could be smart, they judge you. Sometimes teacher's say I am not judging you, but they really are. (Chris lower level Black male)

There is favoritism. They know it's a hierarchy... but they won't admit it. Like a teacher will just call on the White kid over the Black kid because they think the White kid knows the answer Sometime I just call out the answer so they know that I know (Sarah, upper level Black female)

Andrew, White male in honors, had this to say about a Black girl in his class, *"there is a Black girl in level four doesn't dress like she is high income". "Did you see those jeans?" "But she is smart" She made an A on the history test"*. I probed to find out what he meant by saying that there is a Black girl in level four that doesn't look high income? He explained, *"Well, most of the kids in the upper level are like ... have more money than the kids in the lower level."*

The racial segregation also extended to social circles. As with all schools, there are "cliques" and "crowds" and these are also racially segregated. One student told me "there are the popular White kids and the popular Black kids". When I ask the students about the parties and social outings, a White male upper level student said, "most of our parties are all White except for these two Black girls [these girls are perceived as wealthy or high socio-economic status] but they go can do 'ghetto' they do a good job of crossing over." An upper level White female believed that popularity was divided along racial

lines, *“popular Black kids don’t really hang out with popular White kids they talk bad about each other, and you’ll see it on FB and Instagram.”*

Findings also revealed social areas such as the cafeteria was separated as well, one White student commented about the cafeteria, “well our table has two mixed kids...but they don’t count.” I was confused when he said, “they don’t count”, so I probed to find out what he meant, he said, *“I don’t really consider them Black.”* From our conversations and my observations, I would conclude that some mixed Black students who do not self-identify as Black and who do not have the prescribed “Black” attributes were not viewed as “Black” by their social circle.

Due to the lower level consisting of majority Black students and level 4 consisting of majority White students, many of the student relationships were drawn along racial lines. However, all of my Black level 4 students, except for the bi-racial student who did not identify as Black, said they had friends in level 2. Upper level Black students said that they did not have very many friends in their honors classes. However, none of the White upper level students had any friends in the lower level.

One day, I was speaking with a few of the White students about their friends and if they had friends in the lower level and one of the White female students said, *“I think it goes back to your friends corresponding with your classes; if I had classes with kids in level 2 I would be friends with them.”* One of the White male students interrupted and said, *“I don’t think I would be hanging out with them after school, but I would be friendly with them.”* Students were friendly with each other, it was a way to maintain the concept of “diversity”, as long as students were friendly the school appeared to be a diverse “desegregated” school but in actuality it may be desegregated, but not integrated. A

White female said, *“I am one of a few White girls on the volleyball team and we are friendly, it’s not like they don’t like me.”* Another White female, says *“yea, there is a Black girl in my honors Math class and it’s not weird or anything”*. The “Black girl” in the honors Math class Sarah, confirmed that students are “friendly” in class but they do not hang out outside of the classroom, *“like all of my friends that I actually talk to and hang out with are in lower levels.”*

Several Black students in the honors track confirmed that White students are friendly in class, but that is as far as it went. There were not many integrated social groups. Many of the Black students felt that the “friendly” attitudes were superficial because when it was time to work in a group or pick partners for class assignments, they were often left out, *“I don’t feel welcomed because they are all friends, then it’s you...they all sit together and you’re by yourself.”*

Summary

There are extensive racial performance gaps at PHS: 1) college completion and acceptance, 2) Students enrolled in honors and AP classes, and 3) State standardized test scores. Because these gaps occur along racial lines it was important for me to understand the racial climate and context at PHS. The district has declared that it will address and reduce the racial disparities at all levels, however they have encountered extreme resistance from some parents and community members. This resistance is aligned with parents’ desire to guarantee that their children remain advantaged.

The community racial dynamics and racial climate cannot be ignored when analyzing the school’s racial climate. This chapter attempted to dissect racial segregation at PHS by first describing the attitudes and perceptions of Black students and the racial

performance gap in the district. I also described teachers and students perceptions of the school and racial climate. I examined documents, community records, meeting minutes as well as observations of special meetings, I realized that there were several assumptions about Black students. These assumptions were pervasive and were driving the push to maintain the leveling system:

- Black students are presented as lacking ability
- Deleveling (increase Black student participation) will decrease rigor, competitiveness and school status
- Black students lack motivation or external environments conducive to academic success.

The perception that Black students lack ability is substantiated by the overwhelming amount of data that shows how vast the gap is between Black and White students. This data provides justification of White parents to argue that Black students lack ability and that if the school delevels it will decrease drastically in rigor, competitiveness and status. Parents want to ensure that their children are being prepared to be successful in college. The data reveals that parents in favor of leveling believe that upper level students will be disadvantaged if levels are eliminated, because classes will lose rigor. This is based on the assumption that students in the lower levels lack ability or the capacity to work on the level of upper level students. However, the test scores, graduation rates for Black students at PHS are relatively high, and the drop-out rate is low, especially when compared to bordering districts. The biggest gap is in the type of colleges attended after high school graduation. White students were more likely to attend a 4-year college or university while many Black students were attending 2-year colleges.

Black students reported that they experience high levels of racial microaggressions at PHS. These microaggressions are manifested through the negative stereotypes of Black

students in the district. Microaggressions included Black students being viewed as poor and coming from bad homes, Black honor students experiencing alienation in the classroom, and Black students being depicted as low ability.

There were several observable differences in the treatment of Black students. Additionally, Black students who in the upper level classes experienced alienation and isolation in their classrooms. Black students were forced to prove that they belonged in honors or AP. It was essential that Black students in upper level classes maintained their ties and friendships with students in the lower levels. Classrooms and social circles were racially segregated. This type of structure can create a negative racial climate. This type of racial ability grouping can stigmatize Black students as academically inferior (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

Chapter 9: Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusions

There are significant academic achievement gaps between Black and White students on several aspects of the academic domain (Ferguson, 2008; Losen, 2006). Research has shown that racial gaps exist for college enrollment, college degree attainment, types of colleges attended, achievement test scores, grade point average, and even the types of courses taken by students in high school.

Numerous research studies have examined the academic underperformance of black students in America. Much of this research has focused on black students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Insufficient research has looked at the academic performance of black middle class students (Griffin & Allen, 2006). The major objective of this study was to examine factors that contribute to differential academic outcomes of Black and White students at the same school. The present study looked at middle class Black youth who attend a middle class, diverse high school.

Research has shown that many black middle class students have similar academic achievement to low socioeconomic black students and students who attend poor or failing schools (Allen, 2010; Griffin & Allen, 2005). Previous research has also argued that black students at majority white or more diverse schools have better achievement than black students at majority black schools (John, 1981). PHS appeared to be a perfect case study to examine these and other questions, because it is a diverse high school in a middle class neighborhood, and it was experiencing gaps in achievement between Black and White students.

At the time of this research, the community was preoccupied by apprehension and anticipation over what the district would choose to do to remedy Black/White achievement differences. I began my research by attending the school board meetings held to discuss the racial achievement gap and the idea of de-tracking/deleveling. These meetings were intense, and to say the least, shocking. I remember sitting in the meeting when a Black woman walked by and said “oh is this the Black section”, when I looked around I was saddened to notice that the auditorium was segregated with patches of White and Black. Even more disturbing were the comments I heard from some White parents. These comments were filled with outrage and fear that their “gifted” students would be disadvantaged by being placed in classrooms with students of low ability and behavioral problems.

I left these meetings feeling drained. Based on these initial observations of school board meetings, I wanted to investigate the role that race played in the production of perceptions of student ability and performance. I believed that these perceptions of race and ability were a driving force behind the push to maintain racially segregated classrooms, and that the district policies, specifically leveling, perpetuated these perceptions.

Schooling plays an important role in identity formation, specifically the production of racial identities—and can perpetuate racial inequality in society. Lewis (2003) has postulated “Schools play a role in the production of race as a social category both through implicit and explicit lessons and through school practices” (p.188). Practices such as tracking, which segregate students by race, send very important messages about race and intelligence.

Oakes (1985) has argued that school structures such as tracking produce identities by placing them in groups. These groups are not equally valued and the individuals in the groups become defined by their group membership. For example, a student in a high ability group is defined as a high achieving person, bright, smart, quick, and good. On the other hand those in the low ability group are defined as below average, slow, and bad. Oakes further asserted that these types of grouping are a “well-intended” and appropriate way to school children. Similar to Oakes, I believe that these practices must be scrutinized, because “these beliefs are so ingrained in our thinking and behavior –so much a part of the school culture that we rarely submit them to careful scrutiny” (p. 5). “We rarely question the view of the world on which practices are based-- what humans are like, what society is like, or even what schools are for” (Oakes, p. 5).

Microaggression, Leveling, Race and Racism

Based on my initial observations of school board meetings and documents I expected a negative racial climate and to observe a high level of microaggression. Microaggressions are the “offensive mechanisms used against Blacks and are often innocuous” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). Racial microaggressions are defined as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are put downs of blacks by offenders” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, p. 66).

Given the leveled groups at PHS were racially segregated, I viewed the racial tracking of students and the assumption that these students belonged in these groups, because they were less “intelligent” than their white counterparts, as racial microaggression. I believe that the tracking at PHS was not consciously racially

motivated. Nevertheless, the groups were racialized and identities of inferiority and superiority were created. Although not all White parents and students held the belief that White students were intellectually superior [and I'm sure the ones who do believe this would never state this belief publicly], reading and listening to comments from enraged parents displayed deep seated beliefs of who is academically superior and who deserves opportunities to excel.

This presumption that PHS had a negative racial climate was further propagated by stories of an incident that occurred the year before I started collecting my data. Some white students wore t-shirts that lauded the confederate rebels of the United States Civil War. This upset many of the Black students and parents in the district. I attended several meetings of concerned Black students and their parents, and it appeared that although this was one of the worst incidents, it was not an isolated event. Many in the community were also upset because they felt that the White students did not receive an appropriate punishment. At first glance it appeared that this community was racially divided.

However, as the journey continued, I got to know people in the community, Black and White. Everyone I encountered was friendly, cooperative and helpful. I realized that many of the White parents were just as concerned about the racial disparities as Black parents. These parents went out of their way to help me complete this study. Throughout my journey I met parents, teachers and community members who were willing to talk to me and assist me when possible. From these interactions, I realized that the people in the community had an array of ideas and opinions. However, most felt that their community was one built on diversity and tolerance, but when it came to the public schools, parents

had one major concern and that was ensuring that their children received the best possible education that their tax dollars could fund.

Classroom Factors and the Perpetuation of Racialized Ability Grouping

I found that classroom climate was a critical feature of schooling and influenced students' opportunities to learn—similar to findings by Oakes' (1985) in her seminal research on tracking in American schools. A major concern for PHS was lack of black students in the Advanced Placement classes. Although this is a serious issue, it seemed to me that the school was overlooking other very important factors that contribute to the disproportionate numbers of White students in AP: what happens in the classroom prior to 10th grade. What happens in the classroom in the early years determine if a student has had the academic preparation to succeed in advanced classes.

My observation of classrooms and interviews with ninth grade students provided some insight to what students were experiencing in the classroom. Results indicated that the classroom policies and structures, and especially the classroom management, was associated with academic behaviors. Classroom management is, “the degree to which classrooms are orderly and organized, how control is maintained in them, how much students are involved in classroom planning, and the amount of unusual and varying activities that occur there” (Oakes, p.115). There were observable differences in student academic behavior in poorly-managed classrooms and well-managed classrooms. In poorly-managed classrooms, student poor behavior was often considered normal behavior for “those” students. However, in the well- managed classroom, poor behavior was not considered normal for any student and was not tolerated. Similar to achievement, behavior is influenced by teacher expectations.

The behavior of lower level students is often cited as a reason that some are against deleveling. It is believed that these students do not have the social capacity for the upper level. My results showed that student behavior [good or bad] in the classroom is not a fixed characteristic. As I followed students from classroom to classroom, it became very apparent that students behaved differently in poorly-managed classrooms as compared to well-managed classrooms. Teenage behavior can either be deemed deviant or normal and how it is perceived dictates how a teacher conducts the classroom.

Some lower level teachers expected that their students were going to misbehave in every class. For example, I would speak to teachers before beginning to observe a class to let them know that I would be observing their class. If it was a lower level class, then some teachers would immediately tense and stammer, “Are you sure you want to observe this classroom, it’s a level 2?” And they would go on to warn me that the class would be “interesting” and this class was a little different from a “normal” class.

Control and Lack of Control in the Classroom

In the poorly-managed classrooms I would often observe students acting out and being disruptive and on occasion the classroom would seem “out of control”. Students would talk while the teacher was talking, some students yelled at the teacher and picked fights with other students. Students were disengaged, sleeping and playing on their phones. Some students would just get up during class and walk around the room or leave the classroom and not return.

When I asked lower level students why some of their classrooms “were out of control,” students reported that those teacher did not care about them or how they acted. One student comment stood out, a black lower level male said, “*Do something, just say*

something, tell them stop.” These students were testing their boundaries and seeing what behavior was permissible. I was surprised to see poor behavior being ignored or dismissed. Some of the teachers believed that there was nothing they could do, because this was just normal behavior for these types of students. I found the young man’s advice to “say something” quite compelling and truthful. Over the course of the school term, I spent a lot of time in the poorly-managed classroom. On several occasions when there was a substitute, and the students were out of control, I found it impossible to ignore their insolence. I told them to “*sit down, be quiet and do their work*” and to my surprise they did it. I told them that I did not mind if they worked quietly in groups but if they got out of hand they would have to work alone. Not only did I have to “say something,” I also had to “do something.” I sat with a group that were the most disruptive and I helped them figure out the assignment. I found out that these students, the most disruptive, were also struggling the most academically.

In the well-managed classroom poor behavior was not tolerated. Parents were called and students were disciplined when they misbehaved. These teachers did not expect their students to misbehave; they believed that all students were capable of good behavior and capable of succeeding academically. Expectations of behavior influenced how teachers taught and what was being taught in the classroom. When I was in a well-managed classroom, there was not much difference between lower level and upper level classes. It was clear to me that behavior was tied to perception of academic ability. When low expectations of student behavior and academic ability were present, teachers were less likely to allow students autonomy or opportunities to self-regulate.

Additionally, in these classrooms there was more “hand-holding” and “spoon-feeding” of the material. Students were read to and given worksheets to take up time. In these classrooms, much of the learning time was lost because it took students a large chunk of the beginning of class to settle down and throughout class there were sudden outbursts or students would just get up and walk around or leave. This type of behavior should not be tolerated because it allows students to avoid challenging situations. I saw students acting out when they were feeling frustrated or discouraged by an academic activity or sometimes they were just bored.

I had several conversations with one lower level Black male, he appeared smart, but would often sleep in class. When I asked him why he did not participate and why he would go to sleep in class, he said it was because he was bored. When I probed into his background, I found out that he had average test scores and did well in class when he actually did the work. The problem was he did not often do the work. I got to know him over the course of my time in the classroom, and he often wanted to talk to me about college and research. It saddened me that he was stuck in these lower level classes. I believed that he needed a challenge. I was happy to find out that during the second semester he was one of six students moved out of the low ability classroom. It was unfortunate that some students were placed in the lower level because of their behavior; these students were capable of succeeding in the upper level, but they were denied the opportunity. The lower level was full of students with variations of test scores and knowledge. This creates a very volatile classroom environment.

You have students who actually need extra help and students who are at grade level or above in the same class. Both extremes tend to act out. One group because they

do not know the material and they are frustrated, and the other group because they know the material and they are bored. When students are placed in levels based on perception of behavior, these students are being denied an opportunity to receive a more advanced curriculum and the preparation they need to be successful in not only AP classes but also college. Furthermore, my results show that the teacher and classroom climate can influence behavior. A student may demonstrate poor social and academic behavior in one class and demonstrate positive social and academic behavior in the next. The teacher is an important factor in the academic and social behavior of students.

Teachers, Their Academic Expectations, and Student Perceptions

Teachers had higher expectations for upper level students and White students. Their expectations of students influenced how they taught and how they perceived behavior. In poorly-managed classrooms teachers did not attempt to control behavior, because they had low expectations for student behavior. They expected their low level students to misbehave; in the well-managed classroom good behavior was expected, thus the teacher set high expectations for behavior and disciplined students who did not meet those expectations. In the well-managed classrooms, there were few differences in behavior between lower level classes and upper level classes.

Teachers are gatekeepers. They dictate who will be allowed to take upper level classes and who will not. Often teachers make placement recommendations based on how they perceive a student academically and socially. Moreover, teachers felt that students who were not on the “AP track” were not prepared to do well in an AP class. From my observations of the lower level classes I would agree. The lower level students are not being prepared to take challenging classes. Some of these students have the

ability and academic capacity, but they have not developed positive academic behaviors. One reason for the lack of positive academic behaviors is the low expectations for these students. The supervisors and counselors were also very skeptical and hesitant to have students leveled up. There are very low expectations for students who are not already in advanced track and low expectations for many Black students.

Many of the counselors and teachers felt that putting these students in advanced classes would be detrimental, because they were not prepared or they were not motivated enough. Many argued that the Black students did not want to be in AP and they used the infamous arguments “Black students are afraid of looking White” (Ogbu, 1986) or “Black students are lazy and do not want to do the work” (Ferguson, 2008). Although this was a common theme among teachers and counselors, this was not every Black student’s truth. I met several Black students who wanted to be in AP classes and applied, but were denied access. Several teachers have confirmed that some students in their level two class had similar test scores as students in the honors courses. Several teachers revealed to me that teachers get merit pay for students not failing. It is an incentive to keep them in the lower level. Teachers are afraid that if students are in a higher level, they may fail. Unfortunately this school was more concerned with students not failing than challenging students. This was a common theme throughout the district, teachers and students exhibited a fear of failure and this prohibited many students from taking AP classes.

Knowing that many black students faced low expectations of their academic ability and their behavior, and that many viewed black students as the problem, I wondered how these negative expectations and perceptions affected the black students’

perceptions of themselves. Several Black senior students commented that by their senior year they knew that teachers expected less of them than their White counterparts, *“I know that these teachers lack confidence in us.”* Another Black senior reported, *“I feel like I have to do better than everyone else to prove myself worthy of being in AP.”* *“I got in via the test, but still felt like I didn’t belong; the teacher didn’t respect me.”* A Black female reported, *“People in my class are shocked that I would have a good idea”* and *“Black students are not welcomed in any advanced level courses.”* These experiences of Black students are not isolated; research has shown that Black students face prejudice and discrimination at school and these experiences are associated with their academic achievement (Griffin & Allen, 2006; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Wong & Eccles, 1996). One objective of this study was to determine how experiences with discrimination and prejudice influence perception of one’s ability and academic motivation.

The Influence of Racialized Ability Grouping on Black Student Academic Self-Concept and Motivation

After sitting in meetings, and reading local newspapers, I began to wonder how this discussion of black student low ability affected black students. To have to hear and see yourself depicted as underperforming and lacking ability can have some effect on your self-esteem. Race matters in school when students are racially stratified through educational policies (e.g. leveling) which deny Black students equal access to education and rewards for their accomplishments (Mattison & Aber, 2007). Research on racial climate has found that students’ perceptions of racially based experiences are associated with differences in academic self-concept and academic outcomes (Harper, 2010; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003).

Research has shown that these types of microaggression can influence academic achievement of black students (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Fortunately, not many students attend the Board meetings or read the local papers. However, all they have to do is look around their classrooms to see racialized ability grouping. As I expected, Black students in the upper levels were more aware of the racial stigma attached to the lower level or maybe they felt more comfortable discussing it with me. Black students in the upper levels had to deal with negative perceptions of black students in their classrooms. An upper level female student told me, *“I know they think they are better than us”* and an upper level Black male stated *“People in my class always look shocked when I answer a question.”* Steel and Aronson (1995) argue that high achieving black students face stereotype threat. When Black students are faced with a negative stereotype such as Black academic inferiority, their academic performance suffers.

Research has shown that labeling students affects their academic achievement (Rist, 1970). Ability grouping is a form of labeling students as either low achievers or high achievers. This label can become internalized and consequently influence one's perception of his or her ability. Most people want to feel good about their ability and want to protect themselves from feeling incompetent or inadequate. Therefore, if we do not think that we are going to do well on a task, we may avoid the task or discount the task as having no value (Osborne, 1997). Psychological studies have shown that some students discount or devalue the academic domain to protect their self-esteem or their self-concept (Steel & Aronson, 1995). Additionally, students may disengage from the academic domain to protect their academic self-concept. When students' disengage, they may not participate in class or put forth effort in school.

The survey results showed that Black students and lower level students had lower academic self-concept as compared to White students and upper level students. Students with low academic self-concept may doubt their ability to do well in an upper level class or their ability to compete with upper level students. When I asked lower level black students if they thought the classes should be de-leveled many expressed concern with their ability to compete with the upper level students and how they would feel if they were not able to compete. One lower level female stated, *“I think they [upper level students] would answer all the questions and they would make us feel bad.”* A Black male reported, *“I think I could....but I wouldn’t want to look dumb.”* Qualitative findings suggest that teacher expectations and classroom experiences are related to academic self-concept. Students in the low level are aware that they are not receiving the same instruction as students in the upper level and this can influence perception of their ability to do well in upper level classes, *“in like the high levels, they have a lot of work and like high expectations, so like they learn more and they get more test and quizzes, we just have like one...they are probably more prepared.”*

I did not observe or document any reports of Black students not wanting to do well in school or failing purposely because they did not want to be considered “acting white.” In fact, I found the contrary. Black students did not want to be considered dumb. They were hurt if teachers or other students commented negatively on their ability. For example, a lower level Black male told me, *“I enjoy having the highest grade in class, it feels good. Everyone wants to do well. Nobody wants to be the dumb one.”* I observed Black lower level and upper level students becoming upset when they did not get a good grade, especially if others were aware of them not doing well.

Research has shown that Black students care about what their teachers think about them (Casteel, 1997). If students perceive that their teachers do not expect them to do well, it could lower their academic self-concept and consequently their academic motivation. When teachers do not expect students to do well, they do not create opportunities for them to do well or opportunities to develop the skills necessary to do well in school. Strong academic skills help students develop a positive academic self-concept. When students have a positive academic self-concept, they develop positive academic behaviors and are more likely to do well in school (Marsh & Craven, 1997). When students have higher self-concepts, they are more likely to be engaged in school and have better study habits. Causal attributes have also been found to be associated with academic self-concept (Skaalvik, 1997a). If a student attributes success or failure to ability or task or context, it can influence how they perform on future tasks. If students in lower levels attribute their being in the lower level to their ability, or lack thereof, they may not see the point in trying to perform better.

I observed that the idea of “fixed ability” was prevalent among both students and teachers. A fixed view of ability is a belief that ability is an innate personal characteristic, whereas a malleable view of ability is a belief that ability can change and adapt over time (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). An interesting comment from a lower level black male student highlighted the idea of fixed ability. He stated that he did not see the point of studying, *“If I work on something all week and I got the concept it’s no point in studying and if I don’t understand it, it’s no point in studying.”* He did not see the connection between studying, doing homework and learning the material. This result is in line with other research findings that “low-achieving African American students are often likely to

take an inordinate amount of risk, perhaps based upon a failure to recognize the contingency between effort and outcomes” (Gill, 1991 as cited in Harper, 2010 p. 476).

Students who hold a fixed view of intelligence are less likely to exhibit effortful, self-regulatory behaviors (Hong et al, 1998). According to Harper (2010) Black students are more likely to believe in a fixed view of intelligence as compared to White students.

How students view learning and their ability to improve their learning and learn something new can provide insight to student motivation and why a student will put forth effort or not.

I interviewed a few students who had experienced changes in their academic performance from the beginning of the school year to the end. These students believed that they could improve their performance and they were provided with encouragement to improve from their teacher. I observed students in the well-managed classroom go from failing to receiving A's on homework and tests. When I asked one of lower level female student how and why she improved she explained,

Well, I didn't like failing, and my parents were like 'you better get it together' and when I talked to my teacher he said I could improve my grades. He told me I should come to him for help after school and he also let me finish exams when I didn't finish in class. I felt like he really cared and that I actually could do this.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) have argued that schooling that groups students and provides those groups with differential educational treatments reinforce or modify students' self-concepts and aspirations. In effect, this process causes students to internalize the legitimacy of their group, assuming responsibility for their placement. In fact, many of the low level students in this study did express belief that they belonged in the lower level, not so much because of ability, but because of their study habits and behaviors.

When I asked lower level students the difference between lower level students and upper

level students they said, *“They work harder”*; another student reported, *“They don’t have any friends, they just go home and do their work then go to bed.”* The upper level students also believed that they belonged in the upper level, although they admitted that they did not study every day. However, several of them mentioned that they had outside tutors and they did go to the teacher for help. Surprisingly, all students had similar aspirations. The majority stated that they wanted to go to college and planned to go. However, the upper level students had clearer goals, such as the type of college they wanted to attend and the requirements for acceptance. Many of the upper level students had their schedules planned through senior year and they knew which AP courses they would take each year. One upper level white male knew that he wanted to attend Duke University and he had his schedule planned according to their requirements. He told me, *“I am taking Geometry this summer and then next year I will take AP Lit and AP Calc, I heard AP Psych is a b.s. course, so I will take that my senior year with AP Art History.”*

Academic Self-Concept and Motivation

Based on my review of the literature on academic self-concept, I expected to see an association between academic self-concept and motivation. Using goal theory, I examined two types of goals, performance and mastery. Goal setting is a key component of positive academic behavior such as self-regulation. I examined three types of motivation: performance-approach, performance-avoidance, and mastery-approach. Performance motivation (approach and avoidance) is motivation that is driven by a focus on demonstrating ability. Performance approach is motivation to prove competence, ability and self-worth, while avoidance is the motivation to escape looking incompetent or unworthy of extrinsic rewards. On the other hand, mastery-approach is motivation to

gain knowledge and to learn as much as possible-essentially learning for the sake of learning. Mastery motivation has been associated with persistence on challenging task and academic achievement (Hauser-Cram, 1998). Examining the different aspects of motivation provides a deeper understanding of how and why students are motivated.

My observations of lower level and upper level classes showed that lower level students in poorly-managed classrooms demonstrated fewer positive academic behaviors as compared to upper level students and lower level students in the poorly-managed classrooms. These behaviors included setting goals, time management, persistence, and self-monitoring (Harper, 2010). I expected students in lower level to be less performance motivated than students in upper level (Oakes, 1985). But, I expected to see high performance-avoidance scores for black upper level students, based on research on stereotype threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995; Osborne 1997). Graham (1997) argued that students use protective strategies to protect their sense of self. This is why some students may not challenge themselves academically and why others may be disruptive in class. Being disruptive would take attention from their academic performance and put it onto their behavior.

In the poorly-managed lower level classrooms, I observed students with low motivation. These students were disengaged. They did not participate in class, most of the time many did not even know what was going on in the class. Students were more engaged in conversations with their classmates about the fight at lunch or what was happening after school. I observed students sleeping and being disruptive. The one bright spot was during the reading of A Raisin in the Sun when I saw a shift in motivation. The students were excited about participating. They argued over who would

have which role and they did not want to stop even when the bell rang. It appeared that their motivation stemmed from their interest in the subject. As one student told me, *“it’s not boring like the other stuff we read.”* Interest was a motivation factor that differed between low level students and upper level students. Upper level students did not have to be interested in a topic to put forth effort or to be engaged. In the upper level poorly-managed classroom, students were not as excited when reading A Raisin in the Sun, nevertheless they participated in class and, most importantly, they completed their assignments. I found it fascinating that even when lower level students were engaged in the classroom, some of them did not complete their assignment, or if they did the assignment in class they did not always submit the assignment.

The survey results show significant differences between upper level and lower level students and between Black and White students for mastery-approach motivation. Lower level students had higher mastery-approach motivation than upper level, and Black students had higher mastery-approach motivation compared to White students. Mastery approach motivation is lauded as a key component to academic success and leads to greater persistence and greater performance (Pintrich & Garcia 1991). However, many students, even high achieving students, avoid challenges and obstacles. The results from this study are contrary to other research because the lower level students were high in mastery, but have low achievement. Other studies have shown that students high in mastery-approach had more positive self-regulation (Howell & Watson, 2007) and higher achievement (Covington, 1992). Nonetheless, it is possible that the low level students enjoyed learning and wanted to learn, especially when they were interested, but this did not result in positive academic behaviors.

There were no differences in performance-approach motivation between upper level and lower level students. The majority of students in this sample showed performance approach motivation; they wanted their classmates and their teachers to think that they were smart and competent. They did not want to look or feel dumb. I did observe differences between upper level and lower level students; there were differences in classroom engagement and effort. Although lower level students were motivated to prove their ability, they did not exhibit the behaviors associated with academic success, such as completing homework assignments and participating in class. The negative behaviors exhibited by the lower level students could possibly be performance-avoidance motivation. Nevertheless, survey results did not show significant differences between lower level and upper level students for performance-avoidance (adjusting for race/ethnicity and gender), but there was a significant difference in performance-avoidance between Black and White students. All Black students, regardless of level, had higher performance-avoidance mean scores as compared to their white counterparts.

Students who are performance motivated want to demonstrate their competence. These students were driven by competition and extrinsic rewards. I observed students in lower level classes motivated when the teacher turned the lesson into a fun game or competition for points. Performance driven students, high and low achieving, are likely to avoid situations that have the potential to prove incompetence or lack of ability.

Some of the AP courses at PHS had a reputation for being challenging. A black 11th grade student told me, *“Teachers tell you it will be so hard...you rather get an A in Honors than a C in AP.”* This statement suggests that some black students did not take AP classes because they were afraid of not succeeding. Another black student reported

“The drive just wasn’t there for AP, I take my time for everything. I need to know that I am going to do well. I felt I was taking hours for my honors classes and if AP is way worse then I felt AP is not for me. I don’t regret it but sometimes, I wish I would have tried.” Students who are fearful of failing might avoid taking a challenging class to maintain a positive sense of self-concept. I believe the difference between Black and White students and upper and lower level students is the perception of how challenging the task will be. White students in general had higher expectations of their ability, thus they may have been willing to face more academic challenges. This perception is based on previous experiences in the academic domain, some students receive more positive feedback on their ability and they expect to do well on more challenging task. If a student has received cues that they are not as capable or competent in the academic domain, then their threshold for challenge will be lower than a student who has received positive cues about their ability and competence.

Nevertheless, most students regardless of race, were hesitant to take a class that they might fail. Most upper level students told me they would not take a class if they felt like they would fail or not make a good grade. However, many of the upper level students, specifically the White students felt confident that they would do well in AP courses.

Leveling, Race, and Academic Performance: Parents Protecting “Bright” Children

The people in the community (teachers, parents, administrators and even the students themselves) knew that there was a problem and that the school was suffering. However, the problem was deemed to be Black kids. The consensus seemed to be that Black students’ lack of motivation, lack of discipline and lack of ability was hurting the

school. Similar to other research findings the poor performance of black students was blamed on black students and their families (Ferguson, 2008; Lynn et al, 2010). As one parent commented, *“We need to face the fact that difficulties that result from differences in external spheres of influence cannot, and will not, be remedied by gerrymandering our classrooms.”* These factors were considered *“home, parental involvement, role models, peer groups and so on.”* Results indicated that many people in the school and community believed that the problem with black kids were black kids, *“The fact that black children, on average, don’t do as well as white children in school owes to various cultural reason by now well known, but unpleasant to acknowledge and discuss. This underachievement is not easily or entirely remediable by the schools. To the extent that this underachievement is addressed by the schools, the resources devoted to the endeavor can crowd out other goals of education, such as excellence.”*

When the district presented data to the community, in school board meetings, to highlight the racial achievement gaps, the discussion centered on Black students and why they do not do as well as their White counterparts. However, there was not a discourse on the school’s role. Nor was there a discussion around school factors that influence student academic performance. This type of presentation only served to instigate parents’ fears of their children’s education being jeopardized, because data was used to depict black students as low ability and low achievers. One parent commented that this was a *“feel-good experiment that is bound to fail.”* Another commented that, *“If we think that we can foster excellence with a myopic educational strategy that places kids of vastly different capabilities in the same classroom, just so some can feel better. I’m rather inclined do*

believe that what will happen is the brightest students will never reach their potential while the academically challenged will become even more disenfranchised.”

The role of race was not easily assessed or dissected, because the majority of the students in the lower level were black. It was easy for people to ignore race when discussing leveling. Many advocates of leveling based their argument on the perceived low ability of lower level students. This argument was supported with achievement data from state test and reports of poor grades of level 2 students. Many believed that the levels were based on actual academic ability as one parent so adamantly argued, “*Our Board of Education is simply using this catch-as-catch-can approach to the two extremes in our schools, the brightest and the lowest levels. This board is proposing to collapse level 2, 3, and 4 into one level...That means all of Level 2, not just some, as it now stands. So parents, if your child was a Level 4 student, you should be alarmed. Next year they will be the experimental group ‘raising the bar’ for their classmates.*” This parent identified the upper level as the “brightest.” This sentiment was pervasive in the community and although the district was pushing de-leveling as means to increase educational equity, they were fanning the fire, doing more harm than good, because they did not provide evidence that Black students were capable of being successful. People who believed that the levels were based on ability were even more adamant that high achieving students should not be mixed with low ability children.

There was also a belief by many in the community that there was no leveling in elementary school and that these children enter middle schools all having received the same schooling. However, document reviews and interviews showed that at the elementary level students are separated for many subjects including reading and math.

Oakes (1985) also found that schools group students at all levels of schooling, even elementary and at the elementary level teacher are the sole proprietors of group creation. Elementary teachers rarely have to account for their grouping practices. Reading and math are the fundamentals of learning, and if students are not receiving the same reading and math curriculum observable differences in what has been learned will emerge.

Unfortunately these differences are not believed to be based on what students have been taught and the knowledge they have access to, but based on their innate academic ability. Consequently, students who are perceived to have low ability are inundated with low expectations from teachers, community members and other students and even themselves. As Foster (1997) wrote “*Black kids are also haunted by and have to overcome all the negative portrayals of who they are*” (p. 42). As in this study, she found that people expressed prejudice when discussing black students. They are categorized as unruly, deviant and less intelligent than children of other races, “*if this is how black kids are being portrayed to the entire community, then it is unlikely that anyone is going to encourage them to use their ability*” (p.42).

Not only were some parents outraged at the thought of their “bright” children being mixed in with all the low ability children, but threatened to leave the district. Some members of the community believed that if the school was de leveled, it would be viewed as a “bad school.” White parents would leave the district and White parents would not move into the district. As many teachers told me, they believed that the district would not de-level to appease white parents. It is not a new phenomenon that when schools are “integrated” White families either take their children out of the school and put them in private schools or leave the neighborhood completely (Foster, 1997). I was told by some

teachers and some parents that leveling is a way to keep the school segregated and keep white parents happy. As one parent stated, *“as a property owner, I’m concerned that this untested experiment will not only be detriment to educational excellence, but since a school system is a critical component of real estate calculations, it will ultimately diminish our home values.* Another parent commented, *“Despite all the compulsory chirping about ‘diversity’, affluent people—and people of any stripe who expect their children to excel—are not going to move to our towns if our schools are given over by guild, resentment and programs that sacrifice the high achieving students to the purported greater good. Why do you think there are so few Asians in our district?”*

These statements, and other statements by some community members, reveal that there is a very strong opinion by some that intelligence is fixed and that the students in the lower level-black students—apparently are less intelligent and do not deserve the same educational opportunities as the upper level students.

The argument that White parents do not want their children in classes with Black children is difficult to prove since few people will state publicly that they do not want their White children to be in the same class as Black children. It is easier to argue that you do not want your high achieving student in classes with low achieving students because it will decrease academic rigor and your child will not be provided with the opportunity that he or she so rightfully deserves. Nonetheless, one cannot overlook the fact that the majority of the students in the lower levels are Black. Many interviews with community members and teachers and document reviews showed that some believed that the students in lower level were there because of their “culture and their family background.” Furthermore, the overall discussion of the leveling issue was framed as the

problem of the achievement gap between Black and White students. There was a perception of Black students being “bad students,” and Black students who were in the upper levels were considered different from those Black students in the lower level.

Summary

This study is significant because it examined individual factors and school level factors at the high school level. Lucas (1999) urged that future research on achievement and ability grouping “investigate more thoroughly the nexus between social-psychological and structural track location.” This study looks at the structure of leveling a PHS, but also the social-psychological aspects that influence leveling practices.

Several studies have looked at school climate and motivation (Anderman & Mahr, 1994); academic self-concept and motivation (Guay, Marsh, Boivin, 2003); racial climate and academic self-concept (Hurtado, 1970); racial climate and motivation (Wong et al, 1996) but none have examined the relationships among all three concepts. Furthermore, these studies are overwhelmingly quantitative, and few studies have examined academic self-concept and motivation in high schools students. Most research has examined in primary school age students (Graham, 1994; Midgley et al, 1998; Stipek, 2002) and college students (Cole, 2011).

Microaggressions are subtle forms of racism and discrimination (Delgado & Stepancic, 1992). The tracking at PHS was a form of microaggression. It subsequently defines black students as low achievers. Many students were unable to identify it as racism because of the pervasive belief that students were placed in the lower level based on ability. However, many students in the lower level had test scores that were similar to students in the upper level, and many were capable of being in an upper level class.

Another major factor in level placement was teacher recommendation. Teachers made level recommendations based on perceived behavior, perceived ability and likeability.

The leveling system is a significant component of the school's climate and culture. Essentially, the leveling system at PHS created a racialized academic environment. The leveling system produced interactions, daily dialogues and identities around academic ability. It created a White = Smart phenomenon. As one student told me if you are in level 4, then you are viewed as a variation of White and if you are in level 2 you are viewed as "more black." Level was associated with school climate. Students in the upper level had a more positive perception of the school climate as compared to the students in the lower level. This study found that Black students viewed their academic environment positively. Black students are not ambivalent about learning or school, but Black students did rate the racial climate more negatively than White students.

There was a perception of Black students lacking ability and the social capacity to be in upper level classes. Some White parents feared that if the classes were deleveled their students would suffer, because the class would not be rigorous or competitive. Some White parents threatened to leave the district if classes were deleveled. The Board of Education flamed the fire by presenting information on Black students' underperformers. The Board suggested that deleveled will create equity, but there were no discussions about why it is unequitable to level, or the school's role in creating the achievement gap.

Black students and lower level students had lower academic self-concept as compared to White students and upper level students. This is a possible explanation for

student performance in the classroom and why some upper level Black students do not apply for AP classes. There were no significant differences in performance motivation. However, there were observable differences in the demonstration of positive academic behaviors. Students in the upper level classes displayed more self-regulation than students in the lower level. My observations of lower level classes showed that lower level students were more engaged when they were interested in the topic and when they had a genuine interest to learn more about the topic. When they wanted to learn something they would ask questions and even do the work, although some of them would not turn in the work. Even when they cared about learning, they did not care about demonstrating their ability. To some it would seem that they “did not care about school” or they were “lazy.” Interviews and observations suggest that low level students do care about how they are perceived, they do not want to be considered dumb or incompetent; however, they were not as driven to demonstrate their competence with grades and accolades as the upper level students were.

It was surprising that the majority of students, upper and lower level students, stated that they wanted to go to college and planned on attending college. PHS strived to be considered a rigorous and competitive school. The principal proclaimed that school goal was to foster a “college going culture.” I think the push for college is why the majority of students said they planned on going to college even though some of the lower level students were not being prepared for college. The results of the survey showed that there were no differences for performance-approach motivation, all the students wanted their teachers and peers to view them as smart. However, Black students were higher in performance-avoidance motivation. This may explain why some Black lower level

students are disruptive or display negative academic behaviors as well as why some Black students do not want to take AP classes.

The most critical factor in student behavior was classroom climate. In fact, there were significant observable differences in student motivation and academic behaviors in poorly-managed classrooms and well-managed classrooms. Students often test boundaries. This is a part of their development and adolescents have not yet fully developed their decision-making capacity (McMahan, 2009). Teachers in well-managed classrooms understood this and they created a classroom climate that benefited positive student development. In well-managed classrooms, the teacher was able dictate positive academic behaviors, regardless of level. Moreover, lower level students needed well-managed classrooms more than upper level students in regards to exhibiting positive academic behaviors.

Discussion

This study addresses theories that assert family background (Moynihan, 1965), neighborhood segregation (Massey & Denton, 1993), social structural conditions in society (Bourdieu, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976), urban schooling (Anyon, 1980); and cultural differences (Ogbu, 1986) as causes of the academic gap between Black and White students.

Much of the research on the achievement gap has focused on student characteristics and family background influences on student achievement. For example, research has shown that students who come from middle class families and have parents with higher levels of education and higher levels of income will perform better academically as compared to students from lower socioeconomic status families.

However, recent studies have found that Black middle class students are not performing as well as White middle class students (Ferguson, 2008). This study focused on Black middle class students who live in a middle class community and attend a top performing high school in a suburban neighborhood.

PHS has overall high test scores, high school graduation rates and low drop-out rates. Furthermore, it has a higher percentage of students going to college as compared to the state average. However, there is a significant difference in the types of colleges that the Black and White students from PHS attend. Many Black students attend 2-yr colleges while White students attend top 4-yr colleges and universities. This case study enhances our understanding of the racial achievement gap between Black and White students in American high schools. The main objective of this study was to determine school and classroom factors that influence student behavior. Specifically, I was focused on examining how racialized ability grouping is related to student academic self-concept and motivation.

Oppositional Culture: Myth or Fact at PHS?

My research attempts to address the oppositional culture theory put forth by John Ogbu's seminal studies (1985, 1986; Fordam & Ogbu, 1986). Ogbu argued that the underperformance of Black students can be attributed to their perception of limited educational and career opportunities. My study contradicts this finding because the majority of the Black students at PHS come from families with high levels of education and high incomes. Many of the students I interviewed wanted to go to college and viewed it as a means to a successful career and high income. Many of the Black families had higher income levels than White families in the district.

Ogbu also argued that Black students, specifically American born Black students, demonstrate more resistance to school than White students. My qualitative and quantitative findings contradict this argument. My findings reveal that there were no differences on students' desire to do well in school and Black students had more positive perceptions of school climate as compared to White students. Similar to other findings (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Tyson, 2011) I did not observe an oppositional culture among Black students. However, Black students were viewed more negatively than White students and they were in trouble more often than White students. However, this was not due to Black students' resistance to school, but to the racial segregation created by ability grouping and the systematic discrimination that Black students experienced over the course of their education in the district.

I also did not find that Black students were fearful of looking smart or doing well in school. The Black students in this study wanted to be perceived as good students, especially by their teachers. Black students were perceived as academically inferior based on the racialized ability grouping. Black students were over represented in the lower levels. Additionally, my study asserts that White students are intrinsically associated with being smart or good students due to the racialized ability grouping process within the district. There is a perception by some in the district that Black students are academically and socially inferior and this influences how Black students are taught and treated within the classroom. This study goes beyond Ogbu's explanation for racial academic gaps. I posit that we must change the focus from students and family background to schools and how schools' perpetuate racial academic gaps. The school structure, policies, and classroom climate influence the racial achievement gap.

Oakes (1985) examined the structure of schools and how tracking perpetuates inequality. Similar to Oakes, I found that Black students were over represented in the lowest track. However, I did not find any significant differences for student economic status. Oakes found that poor and minority students were most likely to be in the lower tracks. Oakes also found that upper level tracks had a more positive classroom climate which produced higher academic achievement. In this case study, I found that the upper levels had more positive classroom climate; however, I noticed that teachers who had positive classroom climate and good classroom management at the lower level had higher academic achievement, regardless of level. I extend the research to discussion of well-managed and poorly-managed classrooms and how teacher perception of student behavior and ability influence how they manage the classroom. Classroom management was also related to instruction and philosophies of education used by the teacher.

Race Matters in the Academic Domain

Sociologists such as Bourdieu, Bernstein, Apple, and Bowles and Gintis and Jean Anyon argued that students experience school differently based on their social class. Schools in different neighborhoods (e.g. working class, middle class, poor) were examined and differences in teaching philosophies and curriculum were investigated by Anyon and other sociologist. Anyon (1980) suggested that there is a hidden school curriculum and that working class and poor neighborhoods were receiving an education that was teaching them how to be “workers.” Teachers give orders and students are given step-by-step direction with little room for them to figure out things on their own or develop critical thinking skills. In the upper class schools, students are taught how to be managers or leaders. Schools in the wealthiest social class were provided with

opportunities to be creative and manage themselves. Their curriculum and instruction was created to help them develop leadership and critical thinking skills.

My study differed from previous sociological works, because I looked at students in the same school and the role of race instead of social class. This study examined students from the same middle class neighborhood who attended the same school. I wanted to understand how and why students at the same school with similar resources had differential academic outcomes. Similar to previous works in sociology, I found that teaching and instruction differed for students, but not based on social class. Differential teaching and instruction was based on track level. Teacher perceptions of ability and behavior differed based on track level. Students in the lower level classes, with poor classroom management were provided with little to no opportunity to develop positive academic behaviors. The instruction was rote and procedural. Students were provided with step-by-step instructions on what to do and when to do it. Students in the lower level were not being prepared to be successful in college or the professional world.

Stereotype Threat and Racial Microaggressions at School

This study identified structural factors as well as individual factors that contribute to student academic performance. Individual factors such as academic self-concept and motivation are related to academic achievement. I found that Black students had lower academic self-concept and higher performance avoidance motivation as compared to White students. Psychological research on academic performance has found that academic performance can be influenced by one's perception of ability. Research has also found that students who are aware of negative racial stereotypes especially in regards to academics underperform when those negative racial stereotypes are cued (Steele,

1992). In this study, I posit that there is a negative racial stereotype of Black students being academically inferior and that this stereotype is “cued” daily by the racial segregation of ability grouping.

I argue that Black students experience systematic discrimination in the American education system. My case study of PHS found that Black students experienced differential treatment from elementary through high school. This differential treatment resulted in a racial academic gap. The discrimination faced by Black students at PHS was systemic and institutional. School policies such as leveling were racialized. Black students faced several barriers when trying to gain access to the upper levels, especially Advanced Placement. A major barrier was the negative perception of black students as academically and behaviorally inferior to White students. White students were overwhelmingly viewed as better students than the Black students. Interestingly, the students came from the same neighborhoods, but the Black students, especially lower level students, were viewed as coming from low income families or living in single parent households.

Black students in the lower level were not challenged academically. Teachers had lower expectations of Black students. And, because of these low expectations the teacher did not put forth effort to discipline students or push them to develop academic skills, because he believed that the students could not do any better. Low expectations of Black students’ academic ability led teachers to “dumb down” the curriculum. This finding adds to the discourse on racial stereotypes of Black students and how it influences the academic achievement of Black students.

Recommendations

Many teachers argued that students in the lower level were not prepared to do well in AP classes. Observations of lower level classes showed that some of the lower level classes were not preparing students for challenging academic work. First, the students are behind academically because they were not prepared in elementary or middle school. The district starts leveling students as early as 4th grade. Students receive differential curriculum and teaching in reading and math. If students are being taught different curriculum then they are not being educated equally. State data shows that racial gaps on State exams start by the 4th grade. A system of separating students does not provide all students with a rigorous and competitive academic environment. To address the issue of the racial gap in AP, the racial gap has to be alleviated in elementary school and middle school. One cannot expect students who have not been taught how to think critically or who have not been exposed to challenging coursework in elementary and middle school to get to high school and be prepared to succeed in advanced classes.

Many teachers did not hold high expectations for Black students and lower level students. These students were not expected to do well in AP classes. Many teachers and administrators argue that black students did not want to take AP classes. However, I met several black student who not only wanted to take AP classes, they applied for AP classes that they thought they could do well in, and they were denied admittance in the class. Ashley, a 12th grade black female stated, *“I was doing well in my honors class, so I decided to apply for AP History and Art, because I was making A’s in those classes. I was so upset when I didn’t get in. I really thought I would do well and I wanted the opportunity.”* PHS should allow all students who want to take an AP class the opportunity. If a student is not worried about failing the class, the school should not

prohibit them from taking the class or the opportunity to master a new concept.

Furthermore, teachers should not automatically expect that these students will fail. The low expectation of some students prevent the inclusion of all students in AP classes.

All students were not provided with needed information about AP classes and what was needed to take AP classes. For example, many black and lower level students did not know the prerequisites or the process to apply for AP. Upper level students, at ninth grade, knew what AP classes they would take over the course of their high school career. To take full advantage of all AP classes, students needed to start taking AP classes in the 10th grade. They also had to know which classes to take in what year. These students were provided with this information in middle school. PHS held an AP forum, but it was held after school instead of during school hours. If it was during school hours it might have provided an opportunity for the most vulnerable students to get information about AP classes. I recommend that the school hold the AP forum during school hours and require all students to attend. Or the school could reserve time during homeroom to discuss advance placement classes and the process. They should also start discussing AP classes in middle school.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Hi my name is Joyvin Benton and I am a doctoral student at Rutgers University, Newark. I am interested in learning about what students experience in school. I want to discuss your relationships and interactions at school, what you are interested in, your study habits and your goals. This is a voluntary discussion, if you feel uncomfortable at any time or if you do not want to answer a question, just say so and we can skip that question or stop. I am recording this interview to guarantee accuracy, however your identity will remain confidential and this information will only be used for research purposes. Do you have any questions?

Demographic info

1. Please state your first and last name and your age.
2. What English class are you?
3. Where do you live?
4. Do you have siblings? Tell me about them
5. Tell me about your parents...what do they do? Are they married?
6. Where your parents born in the United States?
7. Where you born in the United States? If not, where?

School climate

1. What is the best thing about attending Columbia High School? The worst?
2. Do you feel safe at school? Has there ever been a moment when you did not feel safe?
3. Have you ever been involved in a fight or altercation?
4. Can you describe the level of trust and respect at Columbia High School?
5. Please describe a moment where you felt that students were treated differently because of race.
6. Have you ever been treated differently or unfairly because of your race?
7. Do you think all students are treated fairly? Do all students receive the same discipline?
8. When was the last time you went to a teacher for help with a problem, academic or social?
9. Do you feel that the teachers at Columbia have high expectations for all students?
10. Describe to me your favorite class at Columbia and your favorite teacher at Columbia
11. What do you think are the differences between lower levels in English and the upper levels in English?

12. How many school events, which occur outside of the school day, do you attend during the school year? Describe the last school event you attended.

Academic Self-concept

1. In comparison to other students at Columbia high school, how would you rate your academic performance?
2. How would you rate your academic ability?
3. Are you happy with your current grades? Do you feel that your grades accurately portray your academic ability? Why or Why not?
4. Do you think you are capable of getting straight A's in high school? Why or Why not?
5. What are the most challenges you face academically?
6. What would you say is the main difference between straight A students (or honor roll students) and students who are failing?
7. What are your plans after you graduate from high school?
8. Do you think being smart and doing well in school is the same thing?
9. Describe a moment during your academic career that you tried very hard in a class and you still did not do well.
10. Do you feel comfortable asking questions in class?
11. Can you describe a time where you felt embarrassed or uncomfortable in class?
12. Can you describe a time where you felt that if you asked a question, your classmates would think you were dumb or not as smart as them?

Motivation

1. How competitive is Columbia high school?
2. Do you like school?
3. Do you prefer to take teachers or classes that are known to be hard?
4. How many advanced level classes are you taking?
5. Do you like to do better on exams than your classmates? How does it make you feel?
6. How often do you study?
7. When you do your homework or after an exam do you feel like you have actually learned the material?
8. Would you take a class in a subject that you were really interested in, even if you knew there was a good chance that you could fail the class?
9. How important is it for you to get better grades than your classmates?
10. What factors do you consider when you are making your class schedule?

Appendix B: Observation Protocol

Background Information

Date of observation:

Time of observation:

Teachers Name:

Class (and Level):

Class period:

Classroom Demographics

Total number of students in the class at time of the observation

Number of students by race: Black White Hispanic Other

Are there any Aides in the classroom?

Ethnicity of the classroom teacher: Black White Hispanic Other

Physical Environment

Classroom resources: e.g. Computer, smart-board, calculators)

Classroom space: Crowded plenty of space

How are students seated: tables, desk, or clusters?

Do students self-select seating?

What is on the walls: Student work rules/regulations announcements?

Classroom Instruction

What topic is being taught?

What is the purpose of this lecture?

- Identify prior knowledge
- Introduce new concepts
- Develop conceptual understanding
- Develop critical thinking
- Learning vocabulary/specific facts
- Practicing for mastery
- Assessing student understanding

Was there student activity in collaboration with the lecture?

Did students work: in a group small groups as pairs individually

Classroom engagement

How many questions does the teacher ask during lecture?

Does the teacher encourage critical thinking?

How long does the teacher allow a student to think of an answer?

How many students are sleeping?

Are students prepared: Notebook, writing utensil, textbook?

Are students asking questions?

How many questions have students asked?

Was anyone sent out of class for behavioral reasons?

How many students are late to class? List students

Classroom Culture

Likert scale: 1 Not at all.....5 most of the time

- 1) Is active participation of all students encouraged and valued?
- 2) Students and teacher display respect for students' ideas, questions and contributions
- 3) Interactions reflect collegial working relationships among students (students talk with each other about the lesson)
- 4) Teacher moves around the classroom to interact with students
- 5) Teacher helps students while they are working
- 6) The lesson encouraged students to generate ideas and questions
- 7) Intellectual rigor, constructive criticism, and the challenging of ideas were evident
- 8) Are students asking for help?
- 9) Are students of differing ethnic backgrounds interacting?
- 10) Do students of differing ethnic backgrounds choose to work together in class?

Appendix C: Survey Items and Cronbach Alpha's

Survey Item
1. Academic Self-Concept ($\alpha = .83$)
I feel confident in my ability to learn new material
I am capable of learning the material in all my classes
I feel able to meet the challenge of performing well in this school
I feel confident in my ability to do well in Honors and AP classes
2. Performance-Approach ($\alpha = .70$)
I want to do better than other students in my classes
I would feel really good if I were the only one who could answer the teacher's questions
It's important to me that the other students in my class think that I am smart
I like to show my teachers that I'm smarter than the other students in my class
Doing better than other students in school is important to me
3. Performance-Avoidance ($\alpha = .78$)
An important reason I do my school work is so that I don't embarrass myself
The reason I do my school work is so my teacher doesn't think I know less than other students in my class.
The reason I do my work is so others won't think I'm dumb
One reason I do not participate in class is to avoid looking stupid
One of my main goals is to avoid looking like I can't do my work
It's very important to me that I don't look stupid in class
4. Mastery Goal Orientation ($\alpha = .55$)

I like school work that I'll learn from, even if I make a lot of mistakes

I like school work that I'll learn from , even if I will not make a good grade o the assignment

I like school work best when it really makes me think

An important reason why I do my school work is because I want to get better at the subject

5. Racial School Climate ($\alpha = .80$)

At school, how often do you feel that teachers call on you less often than they call on other students because of your race?

At school, how often do you feel that teachers grade you harder than other students because of your race?

At school, how often do you feel that you are disciplined more harshly by teachers than other students because of your race?

In your school, how often is there racial tension between students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds?

Students who are not of my race (or ethnicity) generally do better in school than I do.

How often do you feel that you get in fights with other students because of your race or ethnicity?

How often do you feel that you are not picked for certain teams or other school activities because of your race?

How often do you feel that kids do not want to hang out with you because of your race or ethnicity?

There is little you can do to avoid racial discrimination at school

6. School Climate ($\alpha = .79$)

Teachers respect all students at my school

Students trust the teachers

I enjoy learning at my school

I look forward to coming to school

My teachers make me feel good about myself

My teachers care whether I am successful or not

Teachers are fair to everyone

Students get bullied often at my school

Appendix D:
Student Responses for Individual Survey Items by Race, Gender and Level
Student responses (percentages) for male and female lower level and upper level
students

Academic Self-Concept

“I feel confident in my ability to learn new material”

<i>I feel confident in my ability to learn new material</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	0.0	10.5	15.8	15.8	36.8
White Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	3.0	3.0	6.1	18.2
White Students	0.0	0.0	9.1	18.2	27.3
Lower Level male students					
Black students	0.0	34.2	23.7	13.2	13.2
White students	0.0	2.6	0.0	5.3	5.3
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	10.5
White students	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	57.9

1. "I am capable of learning the material in all of my classes"

<i>I am capable of learning the material in all of my classes</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	0.0	5.3	36.8	10.5	26.3
White Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
Upper level female students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	12.1	3.0	15.2
White Students	0.0	0.0	18.2	9.1	27.3
Lower Level male students					
Black students	5.3	7.9	34.2	15.8	21.1
White students	0.0	2.6	2.6	5.3	2.6
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	10.5	0.0
White students	0.0	0.0	10.5	5.3	47.4

3. "I feel able to meet the challenge of performing well in this school"

<i>I feel able to meet the challenge of performing well in this school</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	5.3	10.5	15.8	21.1	26.3
White Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
Upper level female students					
Black Students	0.0	3.0	18.2	3.0	6.1
White Students	0.0	0.0	15.2	9.1	30.3
Lower Level male students					
Black students	2.6	21.1	34.2	13.2	13.2
White students	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.0	5.3
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	10.5
White students	0.0	5.3	15.8	5.3	42.1

4. "I feel confident in my ability to do well in Honors and AP classes"

<i>I feel confident in my ability to do well in Honors and AP classes</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Somewhat true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	26.3	21.1	21.1	10.5	0.0
White Students	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	0.0
Upper level female students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	12.1	12.1	6.1
White Students	0.0	0.0	9.1	18.2	27.3
Lower Level male students					
Black students	13.2	47.4	23.7	0.0	0.0
White students	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	10.5	5.3	0.0
White students	5.3	5.3	10.5	5.3	42.1

Performance Approach Motivation

1. "I want to do better than other students in my classes"

I want to do better than other students in my classes	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	21.1	0.0	26.3	15.8	15.8
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	9.1	0.0	15.2	0.0	6.1
White students	9.1	3.0	18.2	9.1	15.2
Lower Level male students					
Black students	18.4	5.3	18.4	13.2	28.9
White students	2.6	2.6	0.0	2.6	5.3
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	10.5	0.0
White students	10.5	0.0	10.5	15.8	31.6

2. “I would feel really good if I was the only one who could answer the teacher’s questions in class”

I would feel really good if I was the only one who could answer the teachers questions in class	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	10.5	0.0	15.8	10.5	42.1
White Students	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	6.1	0.0	15.2	3.0	6.1
White students	9.1	6.1	12.1	6.1	21.2
Lower Level male students					
Black students	18.4	5.3	15.8	13.2	31.6
White students	0.0	0.0	5.3	2.6	5.3
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	5.3	5.3	0.0	5.3
White students	26.3	0.0	15.8	5.3	21.1

3. “It’s important to me that other students in my classes think I’m smart”

It’s important to me that other students in my classes think I’m smart	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	47.4	0.0	15.8	10.5	5.3
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	12.1	3.0	6.1	6.1	3.0
White students	15.2	3.0	21.2	9.1	6.1
Lower Level male students					
Black students	21.1	5.3	31.6	10.5	15.8
White students	7.9	0.0	2.6	2.6	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	0.0	5.3	5.3
White students	26.3	5.3	15.8	10.5	10.5

4. “I like to show my teachers that I’m smarter than the other students in my classes”

I like to show my teachers that I’m smarter than the other students in my classes	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	47.4	0.0	15.8	5.3	10.5
White Students	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	15.2	3.0	9.1	3.0	0.0
White students	21.2	9.1	18.2	0.0	6.1
Lower Level male students					
Black students	31.6	2.6	36.8	5.3	7.9
White students	7.9	0.0	2.6	2.6	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	5.3	5.3
White students	15.8	5.3	21.1	21.1	5.3

5. "Doing better than other students in school is important to me"

Doing better than other students in school is important to me	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	57.9	0.0	10.5	5.3	5.3
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	6.1	3.0	15.2	0.0	6.1
White students	15.2	0.0	18.2	12.1	9.1
Lower Level male students					
Black students	28.9	5.3	28.9	5.3	15.8
White students	5.3	2.6	2.6	2.6	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
White students	26.3	0.0	21.1	15.8	5.3

Performance-Avoidance Motivation

1. "I do my school work so that I don't embarrass myself"

<i>I do my school work so that I don't embarrass myself</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	31.6	5.3	26.3	10.5	5.3
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	18.2	0.0	3.0	3.0	6.1
White students	21.2	0.0	18.2	9.1	6.1
Lower Level male students					
Black students	26.3	7.9	26.3	10.5	13.2
White students	2.6	5.3	2.6	0.0	2.6
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
White students	21.1	5.3	31.6	10.5	0.0

2. “The reason I do my school work is so my teachers will not think I know less than other students”

<i>The reason I do my school work is so my teachers will not think I know less than other students in the class</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	15.8	0.0	31.6	15.8	15.8
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	6.1	3.0	6.1	6.1	9.1
White students	15.2	6.1	18.2	3.0	12.1
Lower Level male students					
Black students	18.4	2.6	18.4	18.4	26.3
White students	0.0	2.6	7.9	0.0	2.6
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	5.3	5.3	0.0
White students	31.6	15.8	10.5	5.3	5.3

3. "The reason I do my work is so other students will not think I'm dumb"

<i>The reason I do my work is so other students will not think I'm dumb</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	36.8	0.0	26.3	5.3	10.5
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	18.2	0.0	3.0	0.0	9.1
White students	21.2	6.1	15.2	0.0	12.1
Lower Level male students					
Black students	35.1	5.4	13.5	16.2	16.2
White students	8.1	2.7	0.0	2.7	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0
White students	42.1	5.3	5.3	10.5	5.3

4. "One of my main goals is to avoid looking like I can't do my work"

<i>One of my main goals is to avoid looking like I can't do my work</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	31.6	0.0	21.1	10.5	15.8
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	12.1	0.0	3.0	3.0	12.1
White students	21.1	3.0	18.2	6.1	6.1
Lower Level male students					
Black students	31.6	2.6	18.4	13.2	18.4
White students	2.6	0.0	5.3	2.6	2.6
Upper level male students					
Black Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0
White students	42.1	5.3	5.3	5.3	10.5

5. "It's very important to me that I don't look stupid in class"

<i>It's very important to me that I don't look stupid in class</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some- what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	10.5	10.5	26.3	21.1	10.5
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	12.1	0.0	6.1	0.0	12.1
White students	21.2	0.0	24.2	0.0	9.1
Lower Level male students					
Black students	15.8	0.0	18.4	5.3	44.7
White students	5.3	2.6	2.6	0.0	2.6
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
White students	31.6	15.8	15.8	5.3	0.0

Mastery-Approach Motivation

1. "I like school work I will learn from even if I make mistakes"

<i>I like school work I will learn from even if I make mistakes</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	15.8	0.0	26.3	10.5	26.3
White Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	6.1	15.2	3.0	6.1
White students	12.1	9.1	27.3	3.0	3.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	10.5	5.3	26.3	15.8	26.3
White students	0.0	2.6	7.9	2.6	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.8
White students	31.6	15.8	10.5	5.3	5.3

2. “I like school work I will learn from even if I will not make a good grade on the assignment”

<i>I like school work I will learn from even if I will not make a good grade on the assignment</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	31.6	0.0	26.3	21.1	0.0
White Students	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	15.2	6.1	3.0	6.1	0.0
White students	30.3	15.2	9.1	0.0	0.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	28.9	2.6	34.2	5.3	13.2
White students	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
White students	36.8	10.5	5.3	10.5	5.3

3. "I like school work best when it really makes me think"

<i>I like school work best when it really makes me think</i>	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	15.8	0.0	42.1	5.3	15.8
White Students	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	6.1	0.0	24.2	0.0	0.0
White students	9.1	9.1	24.2	0.0	9.1
Lower Level male students					
Black students	15.8	2.6	39.5	2.6	23.7
White students	0.0	0.0	5.3	2.6	5.3
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	10.5	0.0	0.0
White students	10.5	5.3	21.1	5.3	26.3

4. "An important reason why I do my work is to get better at the subject"

An important reason why I do my work is to get better at the subject	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	31.6	15.8	31.6
White Students	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.5
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	3.0	6.1	6.1	15.2
White students	3.0	3.0	30.3	3.0	15.2
Lower Level male students					
Black students	7.9	2.6	18.4	7.9	47.4
White students	2.6	0.0	2.6	2.6	5.3
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.5
White students	21.1	0.0	10.5	10.5	26.3

5. "If my school work is not interesting it is more difficult for me to do the work"

If my school work is not interesting it is more difficult for me to do the work	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Some-what true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	5.3	0.0	21.1	26.3	26.3
White Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	6.1	9.1	0.0	15.2
White students	0.0	3.0	12.1	3.0	36.4
Lower Level male students					
Black students	5.3	2.6	31.6	13.2	31.6
White students	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.0	10.5
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	5.3	5.3
White students	5.3	10.5	21.1	10.5	21.1

School Climate

1. "At my school teachers respect the students"

<i>At my school teachers respect the students</i>					
	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	5.3	10.5	15.8	36.8	10.5
White Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	5.3	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	12.1	3.0	15.2	0.0
White Students	3.0	3.0	24.2	24.2	0.0
Total					
Lower Level male students					
Black students	2.6	7.9	33.7	36.8	13.2
White students	0.0	0.0	5.3	5.3	2.6
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.5	5.3
White students	5.3	0.0	26.3	36.8	0.0
Total	3.7	12.8	29.4	45.4	8.3

2. "At my school students trust the teacher"

<i>At my school students trust the teacher</i>					
	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	0.0	21.1	42.1	110.5	5.3
White Students	0.0	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	9.1	12.1	9.1	30.3
White Students	6.1	12.1	27.3	9.1	54.5
Lower Level male students					
Black students	10.5	15.8	42.1	15.8	84.2
White students	0.0	0.0	10.5	2.6	13.2
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	15.3	5.3	5.3
White students	10.5	15.8	26.3	15.8	0.0

3. "I enjoy learning at my school"

<i>I enjoy learning at my school</i>					
	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	0.0	11.1	16.7	38.9	11.1
White Students	0.0	5.6	0.0	5.6	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	9.1	21.2	0.0
White Students	3.0	9.1	21.1	18.2	3.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	2.6	7.9	13.2	50.0	10.5
White students	0.0	5.3	0.0	7.9	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	5.3
White students	15.8	26.3	21.1	5.3	0.0

4 “ I look forward to coming to school”

I look forward to coming to school	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	5.6	22.2	11.1	27.8	11.1
White Students	5.6	0.0	0.0	5.6	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	3.0	3.0	9.1	15.2	0.0
White Students	6.1	21.2	21.2	6.1	0.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	10.5	10.5	21.1	34.2	7.9
White students	2.6	2.6	2.6	5.3	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	33.3
White students	31.6	10.5	21.1	5.3	0.0

5. "My teachers make me feel good about myself"

My teachers make me feel good about myself	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	15.8	10.5	26.3	15.8	10.5
White Students	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	9.1	15.2	6.1	0.0
White Students	3.0	12.1	21.2	18.2	0.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	7.0	10.5	31.6	22.8	10.5
White students	0.0	3.5	7.0	1.8	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	5.8	11.5	5.8	1.9
White students	3.8	15.4	19.2	21.2	0.0

6. "My teachers care whether I am successful or not"

My teachers care whether I am successful or not	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	0.0	5.6	16.7	38.9	16.7
White Students	0.0	000	000	5.6	5.6
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	3.0	9.1	12.1	6.1
White Students	3.0	6.1	6.1	39.4	0.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	0.0	2.6	28.9	28.9	23.7
White students	0.0	0.0	2.6	7.9	2.6
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	10.5
White students	5.3	26.3	15.8	15.8	5.3

7. "Teachers are fair to everyone"

Teachers are fair to everyone	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	26.3	10.5	21.1	5.3	15.8
White Students	0.0	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	6.3	12.5	9.4	3.1	0.0
White Students	12.5	9.4	18.8	12.5	0.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	10.5	26.3	23.7	15.8	7.9
White students	2.6	2.6	5.3	2.6	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.5	5.3
White students	10.5	15.8	10.5	31.6	0.01

8. "Students get bullied often"

Students get bullied often	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	5.3	5.3	36.8	10.5	21.1
White Students	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	3.0	3.0	15.2	9.1	0.0
White Students	9.1	12.1	21.2	12.1	0.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	7.9	10.5	36.8	13.2	15.8
White students	0.0	0.0	7.9	0.0	5.3
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	10.5	0.0	0.0	5.3
White students	10.5	15.8	26.3	15.8	0.0

School Racial Climate

1. "Teachers call on you less often than they call on other students because of your race"

Teachers call on you less often than they call on other students because of your race	<i>Never</i>	<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
Lower level female students						
Black Students	52.6	15.8	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
White Students	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students						
Black Students	12.1	9.1	6.1	3.0	0.0	0.0
White Students	39.4	12.1	0.0	3.0	0.0	0.0
Lower Level male students						
Black students	57.9	10.5	13.2	2.6	0.0	0.0
White students	7.9	2.6	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level male students						
Black Students	5.3	0.0	0.0	5.3	5.3	0.0
White students	47.4	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	10.5

2. "Teachers grade you harder than other students because of your race?"

Teachers grade you harder than other students because of your race?	<i>Never</i>	<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
Lower level female students						
Black Students	42.1	5.3	21.1	5.3	5.3	0.0
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students						
Black Students	12.1	12.1	6.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
White Students	45.5	6.1	0.0	0.0	3.0	0.0
Lower Level male students						
Black students	65.8	7.9	7.9	2.6	0.0	0.0
White students	10.5	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level male students						
Black Students	10.5	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
White students	57.9	5.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3

3. “You get disciplined more harshly by teachers than other students because of your race”

You get disciplined more harshly by teachers than other students because of your race	<i>Never</i>	<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
Lower level female students						
Black Students	31.6	10.5	0.0	5.3	10.5	21.1
White Students	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students						
Black Students	12.1	9.1	3.0	3.0	3.0	0.0
White Students	51.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.0
Lower Level male students						
Black students	52.6	5.3	10.5	5.3	7.9	2.6
White students	10.5	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level male students						
Black Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3
White students	57.9	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3

4. "Teachers grade you harder than other students because of your race?"

In your school how often is there racial tension between students of different racial groups	<i>Never</i>	<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
Lower level female students						
Black Students	10.5	21.1	10.5	21.1	15.8	0.0
White Students	5.3	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students						
Black Students	6.1	3.0	6.1	9.1	6.1	0.0
White Students	0.0	15.2	24.2	9.1	3.0	3.0
Lower Level male students						
Black students	26.3	10.5	10.5	26.3	5.3	5.3
White students	2.6	0.0	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.0
Upper level male students						
Black Students	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3
White students	15.8	21.1	10.5	15.8	5.3	0.0

5. "Student who are not of my race generally do better in school than I do"

Students who are not of my race generally do better than I do	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	15.8	21.1	5.3	21.1	15.8
White Students	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	0.0	3.0	6.1	21.2	0.0
White Students	6.1	24.2	24.2	0.0	0.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	13.2	18.4	21.1	28.9	2.6
White students	10.5	2.6	0.0	2.6	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.1	5.6
White students	22.2	16.7	27.8	0.0	0.0

6. “How often do you feel that you get in fights with some kids because of your race?”

How often do you feel that you get in fights with some kids because of your race	<i>Never</i>	<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
Lower level female students						
Black Students	42.1	10.5	5.3	5.3	0.0	15.8
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students						
Black Students	26.9	9.6	1.9	1.9	0.0	7.7
White Students	28.8	5.8	1.9	1.9	0.0	0.0
Lower Level male students						
Black students	51.4	24.3	8.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
White students	13.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level male students						
Black Students	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0
White students	52.6	10.5	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0

7. “How often do you feel that you are not picked for certain teams or other school activities because of your race?”

How often do you feel that you are not picked for certain teams or other school activities because of your race	<i>Never</i>	<i>Almos t never</i>	<i>Occasiona lly</i>	<i>Somet imes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
Lower level female students						
Black Students	42.1	21.1	5.3	5.3	5.3	0.0
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students						
Black Students	18.2	3.0	6.1	0.0	3.0	0.0
White Students	42.4	12.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lower Level male students						
Black students	66.7	13.9	0.0	2.8	2.8	0.0
White students	5.6	2.8	0.0	0.0	2.8	0.0
Upper level male students						
Black Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3
White students	47.4	5.3	10.5	0.0	5.3	0.0

8. “How often do you feel that kids do not want to hang out with you because of your race?”

How often do you feel that kids do not want to hang out with you because of your race	<i>Never</i>	<i>Almost never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Almost always</i>
Lower level female students						
Black Students	31.6	5.3	10.5	26.3	0.0	5.3
White Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students						
Black Students	6.1	9.1	9.1	0.0	6.1	0.0
White Students	42.4	3.0	3.0	6.1	0.0	0.0
Lower Level male students						
Black students	58.3	16.7	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
White students	5.6	2.8	0.0	2.8	0.0	0.0
Upper level male students						
Black Students	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3
White students	47.4	5.3	5.3	5.3	0.0	5.3

9. "There is little you can do to avoid racial discrimination at school?"

There is little you can do to avoid racial discrimination at school	<i>Not at all true</i>	<i>Usually not true</i>	<i>Somewh at true</i>	<i>Usually true</i>	<i>Very true</i>
Lower level female students					
Black Students	26.3	0.0	31.6	21.1	0.0
White Students	5.3	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0
Upper level Female students					
Black Students	12.1	0.0	12.1	3.0	3.0
White Students	12.1	9.1	27.3	3.0	3.0
Lower Level male students					
Black students	38.9	5.6	27.8	11.1	2.8
White students	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper level male students					
Black Students	5.6	0.0	5.6	0.0	5.6
White students	33.3	11.1	16.7	0.0	5.6

Appendix E: Bar Chart of Self-Reported Grades and Student Level