

AN INVESTIGATION OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE
BLACK SUBURBAN STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN HONORS
AND ADVANCED CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

Research has demonstrated that there is a Black-White academic achievement gap across the United States. This academic achievement gap is evident in college graduation rates, standardized test scores, and enrollment in high school honors and advanced placement classes. In racially diverse suburban public high schools, Blacks students are vastly under-represented in honors and advanced classes. To better understand this aspect of the Black-White academic achievement gap, this exploratory study examined factors that may influence students' decisions regarding course enrollment. A mixed methods case study was conducted at a racially mixed suburban high school that examined students' academic self-concepts, experiences with ability grouping and perceptions of the honors classes. It also explored how these and other factors may be associated with their decisions to enroll or not enroll in honors and advanced classes. Specifically, this study explored the possibility that Black student reluctance to enroll in honors and/or advanced classes may be related to diminished academic self-concept resulting from their perceptions and experiences related to ability grouping, also known as tracking. This study revealed that ability grouping has been used to develop a caste system in racially diverse suburban schools that undermines the academic achievement of students of color. The findings demonstrate that although students can possess strong academic self-concepts they are often unable to overcome the barriers to academic achievement that are inherent in the practice of ability grouping.

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DEDICATION

My doctoral degree is dedicated to my mother,
who always believed,
Doreen Veronica Beckles James

Dear God,

I dedicate this work to you,

Imprint your mind upon it,

Fly with it unto the heavens,

Use it to shower your love onto the world.

Thank you for your faith in me that such a
 \
glorious mission has been place in my hands

Amen

Marianne Williamson
Illuminata

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Introduction

1. Research Problem

In racially diverse suburban districts, such as West Orange, New Jersey, there are significant differences in academic achievement between Black and White students. When students attend school in a district in which they have access to a wealth of resources and quality teachers, such as is commonly found in suburban districts, one would expect that there would be high academic achievement experienced by the majority of the student body. However, in predominantly White and racially diverse suburban public high schools, there is a significant difference in the academic achievement of Black and White students (Tyson, 2011, pp. 66,67).

This Black-White academic achievement gap is readily apparent in the underrepresentation of Black students in honors and advanced classes (Tyson, 2011, p. 7). In almost all schools, (student) choice has become an increasingly salient factor in placing students into tracks, shifting the responsibility for differentiated opportunities, resources, and expectations from the school to students (Oakes, 1995). Teacher and guidance counselor recommendations are no longer required for enrollment in honors classes. Students have the opportunity to enroll in any class they choose. As a result, it has become commonplace for Black students to be blamed for their underrepresentation in honors and advanced classes. However, as noted by Karolyn Tyson in *Integration Interrupted, 2011*, all students have the same principal motivation, regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status, for the selection of classes (Tyson, 2011). Students select classes that they believe are a good fit for them (academically and socially)” If students can select their own courses and they select them based on the same motivation as other students, it is puzzling why Black students do not choose to enroll in honors and advanced classes. This exploratory study was conducted to gain insight to students’

perceptions and experiences that may influence their decisions regarding course selection and enrollment. Specifically, this study assessed students' academic self-concept, examined their experiences with ability grouping (tracking), and identified their perceptions of honors classes. It also explored and described how these and other factors may influence students' decisions regarding selection and enrollment in honors and advanced classes.

2. Studies Addressing the Problem

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) have conducted studies that focus on the academic achievement gap that exists among Black and White suburban students. These studies contributed to the prevailing cause known as the "burden of acting White" which is purported as contributing to the lower academic achievement of suburban Blacks (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). John Ogbu is the well-known author of this theory, which pertains to minority student achievement and what he posits as an oppositional culture to "acting White". This theory of oppositional culture and peer pressure not to "act White" is commonly used to explain the under-representation of Black students in honors and advanced classes. There is, however, mounting evidence that Black students are not concerned about "acting White". Black students who did not enroll in advanced classes were not afraid of being accused of acting white rather they were concerned about not doing well academically. Their decision to not enroll in honors classes was related to their perception that their grades would suffer because they would not be able to handle the amount or level of work required (Tyson, Castellino, & Jr, 2005).

John Ogbu also argued that a result of the oppositional culture stemming from the fear of acting White is that Black students become disengaged from school (J. Ogbu, 2003). Roslyn Mickelson's research revealed that Black students may be disengaged but there is no evidence that it is related to an oppositional culture or fear of acting White

(Mickelson, 1990). It may be related to students' perceptions of inequities in school practices and policies. As noted in the article "Its Not a Black Thing", "oppositional attitudes appear to be connected to everyday experiences of inequality in placement and achievement" (Tyson et al., 2005). There are school policies and practices that can make a student believe that they are not likely to succeed or do well in certain classes and consequently they may choose to not challenge themselves by enrolling in high level academic classes. One such practice, in which Black students in racially diverse schools may perceive that there are inequities, is "ability grouping". Karolyn Tyson's studies reveal that this practice (ability grouping) of separating students for instruction ostensibly based on their ability and prior achievement often results in segregated classrooms in predominantly White and racially diverse schools. The image of overwhelmingly Black lower classes and overwhelming White advanced classes can send powerful messages to students about ability race, status and achievement (Tyson, 2011). Black students' concerns about their abilities and perceived difficulty related to honors and advanced classes may be related to their experiences with ability grouping. Students' interpretations and perceptions of what Tyson terms as "racialized tracking" and "in-school segregation" can affect students' academic self-concepts as well as influence their decision to enroll or not enroll in honors classes (Tyson, 2011).

There has been limited research about students' perceptions and experiences that may be associated with their decision to enroll or not enroll in honors and advanced classes. It is important to gain an understanding of students' perceptions and experiences because of the potential affect on their academic achievement. Student perceptions of classroom process, teachers' behaviors and school life can effect how much they can much more than life events. Although students may appear unengaged or alienated they

think about school and act accordingly. Students' school experience do not have independent meaning (Schlosser, 1992).

This study will explore the possibility that Black student reluctance to enroll in honors and/or advanced classes may be related to diminished academic self-concept resulting from their perceptions and experiences related to ability grouping also, known as tracking.

3. Deficiencies in Past Literature

Despite numerous studies that have been conducted to address the Black-White academic achievement gap, there are issues that remain under-researched in reference to perspectives and areas that have not yet been addressed. For instance, studies addressing the Black-White academic achievement gap have generally focused on the differences in socioeconomic conditions that contribute to low achievement (Lynn, 2010). However, the low enrollment of Blacks in honors and advanced classes is evident in public high schools throughout the United States and crosses socioeconomic lines. In the United States, educational achievement gaps exist throughout racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines. These academic achievement gaps are especially pernicious because even when socioeconomic status is control these gaps are evident across racial and ethnic lines. Students of color from middle class or even upper-income families, still have less academic achievement than White and Asian students of the same socioeconomic class. This achievement gap may in some ways be related to resource inequalities to some degree however the causes are greater than this (Sadovnik & Tractenberg, 2009).

There is a need to further investigate the Black-White academic achievement gap experienced in suburban districts because unlike urban districts, this gap exists in the presence of an abundance of resources and qualified teachers. Research in this area has

centered on the belief that Black students and their parents are responsible for their under-achievement (J. Ogbu, & Simons, H., 1998). This focus does not provide insight into the ways that system-level (structural) forces can influence student experiences, perceptions and decisions (i.e., course selection). Although some research has addressed the effect of low student achievement, much of this literature is presented from the perspective of teachers and administrators (Lynn, 2010). Students' perceptions and experiences with ability grouping must be examined to assess how this may present barriers to enrollment in honors and advanced courses. A review of the literature found no research or previous studies exploring an association between students' perceptions of their academic self concepts, perceptions of honors classes, experiences with ability grouping, and their decisions concerning enrollment in honors and advanced classes.

4. Significance of Study

This study will compliment existing literature and provide insight as well as give voice to students' perceptions of factors that are associated with their academic experience and course enrollment. Previous studies that addressed teachers' and educators' perceptions of factors related to the Black-White academic achievement gap focused on urban school districts (Brophy, 1986; Smith, 1997; Uhlenberg, 2002).

Thus, this research is significant because it will examine students' academic self-concepts, perceptions of honors courses and their experiences with ability grouping (tracking), in a racially diverse suburban high school. It will investigate how these and other factors may affect students' decisions regarding enrollment in honors and advanced classes. Parents, teachers, guidance counselors and community action groups can then develop an understanding of students' perceptions concerning honors and advanced classes, academic abilities and academic experiences. They can also develop

interventions to help students understand the role that honors and advanced classes can play in their academic achievement. This research will provide information that can help students who are not taking challenging courses to opt for these classes. This study will provide information for counseling and in-school support that encourages students to enroll in honors and advanced classes, which can result in improved academic achievement.

This study will also expand the body of knowledge related to the Black-White academic achievement gap because it will offer an important insider's view, gained by asking students about their experiences and those perceptions that may influence their selection of courses.

5. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify and understand Black students' perceptions and experiences that may influence their course-taking choices at a racially diverse suburban high school. In this study, student choice is defined as the selection of academic tract (honors, non-honors and institutes) from those choices available at West Orange High School in West Orange, New Jersey. This research was undertaken to gain insight into black students' perceptions of their academic abilities, perceptions of honors classes and ability grouping, and how these and other factors that may influence their decision to enroll or not enroll in honors classes. Additionally, individual level factors (such as socioeconomic indicators and ethnicity) that may influence their choices were also examined.

6. Research Questions

This mixed methods study investigates the following:

- Are students' academic self-concepts associated with their enrollment in honors classes?
- Are students' academic self-concepts associated with their experiences with ability grouping?
- Are students' perceptions of honors courses associated with their academic self-concepts?
- Are students' perceptions of honors courses associated with their enrollment in honors and advanced classes?
- Are students' perceptions of honors courses associated with their experiences with ability grouping?
- Are students enrollments in honors and/or advanced classes associated with their experiences with ability grouping?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Many laws have been passed to address equality in education for all persons regardless of race, ethnicity or gender. However, despite these legislative regulations, Black student achievement continues to lag significantly behind that of White students. This Black-White academic achievement gap has educational ramifications related to inequality as well as economic implications for this nation. If the United States wants to remain a global leader in the global economy it is imperative that we maintain a pre-eminent workforce of the world, which means the workforce that has the strongest skills. The long-term prospects for a healthy national economy and social stability depend on boosting the achievement level for all students (Roach, 2004). America must address and improve the academic achievement of all children in order to sustain its role as a world leader and remain an effective competitor in the global economy.

Education and Health Outcomes

Ethnic disparities in academic achievement are critical both because they reflect ongoing social inequity and because they have social and health consequences. (McKown & Weinstein, 2008). The one social factor that researchers agree is consistently linked to longer lives in every country where it has been studied is education. It is more important than race; it obliterates any effects of income.(Kolata, 2007).

The magnitude of the relationship between education and health varies across conditions, but is generally large. An additional four years of education lowers five-year mortality by 1.8 percentage points; it also reduces the risk of heart disease by 2.16 percentage points, and the risk of diabetes by 1.3 percentage

points. Four more years of schooling lowers the probability of reporting oneself in fair or poor health by 6 percentage points and reduces lost days of work to sickness by 2.3 each year. Although the effects of gender and race are not shown, the magnitude of four years of schooling is roughly comparable in size to being female or being African American. These are not trivial effects.

(Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2006, p. 4)

The causes of health disparities between Blacks and Whites have been debated, researched and evaluated for years. The common causes for these disparities are generally noted as being related to poverty and lack of access to quality care. A major goal of President Obama's health care legislation has been to provide health insurance for everyone. Health Economist Dr. James Smith believes, however, that health insurance is vastly overrated in the policy debate. He and others say what may make the difference is keeping young people in school. A few extra years of school are associated with extra years of life and vastly improved health decades later in old age. (Kolata, 2007). Cutler and Lleras-Muney's study (2006) addressing the differing reasons why education may be related to health revealed that the obvious economic explanations – education is related to income or occupational choice – explains only a part of the education effect. They suggest that increasing levels of education leads to different thinking and decision-making patterns. The monetary value of the return to education in terms of health is perhaps half of the return to education on earnings, so policies that impact educational attainment could have a large effect on population health.

Efforts to address the Black-White academic achievement gap have the potential to eliminate or reduce educational inequalities and impact health disparities. Additional data supporting the impact of education on health was delineated in the report from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's "Commission to Build a Healthier America". The

Commission analyzed data from U.S. Census Bureau and Center for Disease Control (CDC) surveys conducted from 2005 to 2007. Overall, 45 per cent of participants reported their health as being less than very good. But education was the tipping point. The more education people had, the more likely they were to report better health, regardless of race or ethnicity. That difference didn't just show up when the commission compared people with the fewest and most years of schooling. Even a few years of education made a difference. For instance high school graduates were nearly twice as likely as college graduates to report being in less than very good health (Hitti, 2009). Efforts to address the Black-White academic achievement gap have the potential to affect not educational inequities but also health disparities.

Black-White Academic Achievement Gap

There have been ongoing academic and legislative efforts implemented to address the educational inequalities that are reflected in the Black-White academic achievement gap in the United States. One of the most well known legislative efforts was Brown versus the Board of Education. This legislation appeared to have had an initial positive impact on this academic achievement gap. The achievement gap pertaining to Black and White students between 1970 and 1988 was cut in half, and the gap separating Latinos and Whites declined by one third. Unfortunately progress came to halt around 1988, and since that time the gaps have widened (Muir, 2003).

The fiftieth anniversary of U.S. Court's school desegregation order in Brown V. Board of Education has intensified public awareness of the persistent gap in academic achievement between Black students and Whites (Rothstein, 2004). There is evidence that Black students' basic skills continue to lag significantly behind White students. As noted in *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*, "the average Black 12th grade students' proficiency in basic skills is roughly the same as the average White 8th grader

(Roach, 2004). Statistical evidence of this Black-White academic achievement gap can also be found in standardized test scores, graduation rates and enrollment in honors and advanced placement classes. It has been widely reported that, on average, if White students score at around the 50th percentile on a standardized math or reading test, Black students typically score around the 23rd percentile (Rothstein, 2004).

Suburban versus Urban Schools

Studies addressing the academic achievement gap between Black and White students' often focus on urban school districts, where differences in socioeconomic conditions often contribute to low academic performance (Smith, 1997). Academic disparities that exist within urban school districts are often related to inadequate resources (i.e., teachers, books, supplies, facilities). It is important to note that although the Black-White academic achievement gap is made up partly of the difference between the achievement of all lower class students and that of middle class students, there is an additional gap between Black students and Whites, even when Black and Whites come from families with similar incomes (Mckinsey & Company, 2009)

A Black-White academic achievement gap that is not related to resource inequalities can be found in racially mixed and predominantly White suburban school districts throughout the United States (Oakes, 1985; Tyson, 2011). Evidence of this gap that crosses socioeconomic lines was noted in a report from the College Board that stated "there is an even greater gap in student achievement in schools in suburban middle-income communities than in inner cities, particularly at the higher achievement levels" (Chau, 2012). Karolyn Tyson's research also noted that Black students are significantly under-represented in honors and advanced placement classes in racially mixed and predominantly White suburban high schools (Tyson, 2011).

There are many schools of thought concerning why Black students are under-represented and/or are reluctant to enroll in honors and advanced placement classes. Some potential causes that have already been investigated are perceptions of opportunity structure (Mickelson, 1990), student engagement (Ferguson, 2001), tracking (Oakes, 1987; Tyson, 2011), teacher encouragement (Flaxman, 2003) as well as oppositional culture and acting White (Ogbu, 2003).

Oppositional Culture

One of the widely accepted theories addressing the cause of the Black-White academic achievement gap is that Black students develop an “oppositional culture” that stems from a desire to not be labeled as “acting White” (J. Ogbu, 2003). Although Fordham and Ogbu published the article, *Black Students’ School Success: Coping with the “Burden of Acting White”* more than thirty years ago, it remains among the most influential publications addressing the academic underachievement of Black students and the Black-White achievement gap (Castellino et al, 2005).

Even then-senator Barack Obama, during the 2004 Democratic National Convention, mentioned the theory of acting White notion when he indicated there was a need to eradicate the slander that says a Black youth with a book is acting White (Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon, 2007). Although the “Acting White” explanation is widely used, there is mounting evidence that this is not a valid explanation for the underrepresentation of Blacks in honors and advanced placement classes. Generally, when students use this term it is not related to academic achievement. It is more commonly associated with the use of proper language versus slang or listening to hard rock music instead of rap music. In racially diverse high schools, Black students with high achievement are only slightly more likely than low achieving Blacks students to believe that they may be accused of acting white. Findings reported in “It’s Not A Black

Thing” suggest that the reason high achievers are targeted more is not their high achievement, per se, but instead aspects of their personal styles such as the ways that they speak, the music they listen to and their propensities to be open and trusting of youth who are strangers (Tyson et al., 2005). This was confirmed in data from Ferguson’s Tripod Survey that also showed “the strongest predictors of the ‘acting White’ accusation are musical preferences (listening to rock music) and personal style (using standard English in informal settings and having a trusting attitude toward strangers), not GPA or academic aspirations” (Ferguson, 2007).

Student Disengagement

Another popular explanation for the Black-White academic achievement gap is the belief that Black students are disengaged from their schooling experience. Indeed, John Ogbu further asserted that Black students develop an oppositional culture because of a fear of “acting white” which causes them to become disengaged from their achievement (J. Ogbu, 2003). Several researchers found no empirical evidence to support the oppositional culture theory hypothesis (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey (1998), Cook and Ludwig (1998), Ferguson (2001). In addition, there is no convincing data to support the claim that Black students are substantially more disengaged than White students (Diamond et al., 2007).

Ronald Ferguson is another researcher who is well known for studying the Black-White academic achievement gap. Black students are not disengaged from the studies and are just as motivated as Whites but often lack study skills necessary to improve upon their learning (Roach 2004). Eric Flaxman noted that Black student’s study and do the same amount of homework as White students (Flaxman, 2003). In addition, Fergusons’ survey responses confirm that Black, White, and Hispanic students give similar reports of

how important their friends think it is to work hard to get good grades in school (Ferguson, 2007).

Achievement Ethos

Another commonly held belief is that Blacks do not value education (Cook & Ludwig, 1998). This belief is associated with the opinion that Blacks are often disillusioned by inequalities in the opportunity structure. Prudence Carter (2005) indicated that middle and upper middle class African Americans, in spite of economic successes, maintain critical political viewpoints of the opportunity structure in the United States society because of experiences with racial discrimination and prejudice. However Prudence Carter did not agree with Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory that involuntary Blacks establish practices in opposition to middle class Whites, which results in a rejection of school and lower academic achievement. It is possible that while Blacks are aware that Whites are afforded greater access and awards in the opportunity structure, they also believe that they have to participate in the process in order to have any chance for upward mobility.

Even when Black parents experience discrimination, they continue to value education and stress the importance of an education to the children. In the Black community, parents are known to tell their children that they have to work harder and obtain more education than Whites in order to succeed. Nationally representative research has shown that Blacks subscribe to the basic value of education as much or more than Whites (Carter, 2005). John Diamond (2007) advocates moving beyond traditional cultural explanations for the Black-White achievement gap. Instead, he argues that more attention be given to the structural, institutional and symbolic disadvantages that shape the racialized terrain Black students navigate (Diamond et al., 2007).

Theoretical Framework

Conflict theory, critical race theory and self-concept theory are applied throughout this study. Conflict theorists believe social reproduction continues to occur because the whole education system is overlain with ideology provided by the dominant group (Bowles & Gintis, 2003). McLeod's "Ain't No Makin' It" is a good example of conflict theory as applied to education. He argues that teachers treat lower-class kids like less competent students, placing them in lower tracks because they have generally had fewer opportunities to develop language, critical thinking, and social skills prior to entering school than middle and upper class kids. When placed in lower tracks, lower-class kids are trained for blue-collar jobs by an emphasis on obedience and following rules rather than autonomy, higher-order thinking, and self-expression (MacLeod, 1995).

Social Reproduction

Schools basically operate under the illusion of the achievement theory, in which everyone is imagined to have equal opportunity. In reality, however, schools are merely converting social hierarchies into academic hierarchies" (MacLeod, 1995). In contrast to this position, many people believe school is a great equalizer. However Bowles (2002) and MacLeod (1995) would argue that is not true. They believe that schools are designed to recreate labor force and reproduce social inequalities.

Herbert Gintis (2002) shared the deterministic view of Bowles affirming that schools became ideological sites promoting and reproducing the capitalistic economy as well as legitimizing social divisions of labor. Bowles and Gintis are both conflict theorists who believe that schools reflect society at large. They believed that dominant power structures outside the school are reproduced within the school itself (Samuel Bowles, 2002). Sociologist Pierre Bordieu also acknowledges this arguing that dominant

group defines culture capital and that the dominant cultural values are held in esteem over the culture of others. Scholars argue this is reflected in the hierarchical school, in which reflects lower class habits and values are systematically devalued Interestingly, in contrast to Bowles and Gintis, Bordieu's theory is not deterministic or based on status. He believes that students internalize the systematic inequalities that are evident in larger structural forces. In his work, Bordieu emphasizes the integral relationship between structural forces and individual agency (Tierney, 1999).

Schools have been used to create labor force since the advent of the industrial revolution, when small farmers were driven out of business and forced to work for wages and salaries. The resultant division of labor between the controllers and the controlled led to the expansion of schooling so that young people could learn to adapt to factory environment (Samuel Bowles, 2011).

As the need for skilled laborers increased, the inequalities in the school systems simultaneously increased in order to prepare more students for skilled labor. Schools no longer provided the same education for everyone. Instead it was determined that education should be based on the needs of the child. Progressive reform, which included educational testing and tracking, led to a system of class stratification within the school. Class stratification developed rapidly within schools as students were socialized in accordance with their economic status. As the United States becomes increasingly more racially diverse, the practice of tracking has also led to racial inequalities within schools. The academic achievement gap that exists between Black and White students is due to racial inequalities that are reproduced through the school system. Amanda Lewis (2006) uses the term "racialization" which occurs in schools as the curriculum and teacher serve as forces of reproduction that promulgate ideas about race and racial inequalities.

After the Brown vs Board Education decision resulted in mandatory integration in public schools, many school districts implemented ability grouping (also known as tracking). The use of tracking, as noted by Irvine, guarantees the separation of children by race and class, resulting in the maintenance and reproduction of a system of social and economic stratification (Irvine, 1990). For many students of color, schools have become sites of resistance, alienation, silence, and ultimately failure (Fine, 1987; Ford & Harris, 1999; Nieto, 1994; Sola & Bennett, 1985) as cited by (Howard, 2003). This is clearly evident when Black students in predominantly White and racially diverse high schools are routinely not afforded equal access to educational opportunities that are available within the school. Black students and especially Black male students are tracked to lower level classes and White students are tracked to higher-level classes.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory provides insight and a framework for this study, which takes into consideration practices that exist in schools that may lead to discrimination and affect academic achievement. Educators like to believe that schools are institutions that are created to provide access to quality education for all students' equally. Race, however, is a dynamic that is ever present in racially diverse schools and can affect the educational process. Contrary to the laudable goal that educational system functions from a stance of non-color with all students being seen as the same and faculty are color-blind, it is evident that racial differences continue to be a major component in the school environment and something students must navigate daily.

Race can shape the educational terrain at two levels, both material and symbolic. Structural and institutional resources, that parents have access to, are shaped by the

material conditions of their lives. In addition, race shapes how students and parents are perceived by others and it can symbolically structure their lives (Diamond et al., 2007).

Critical race theorists note that teacher's perceptions and expectations of students could be based on their belief of a dominant (White) culture which results in Whites getting preferential treatment while non-Whites are not encouraged or expected to achieve academically. (Thompson, 2004). The implications of teacher perceptions are compounded by the fact that often teachers are unaware that they have biased perceptions. Teachers often believe that they are "color blind", meaning that they do not see race and treat all students equally. Critical race theorists hold that color blindness will allow us to redress only extreme egregious harms, those that everyone would notice and condemn. But if racism is embedded in our own thought processes and social structures as deeply as many critical race theorists believe, then the "ordinary business" of society – the routines, practices and institutions that we rely on to effect the world's work - will keep minorities in subordinate positions (Delgado, 2012).

Teacher Perceptions, Expectation and Bias

The role that teachers play in the academic achievement is more complex than ensuring quality curriculum is utilized for class instruction. Discussions with students at racially diverse suburban public high schools have revealed that teachers are known to question Black students on the first day of class when they enter an honors classroom. These students are asked, "Are you lost? Are you certain you are in the correct classroom? Or, "Can I see your schedule"? These questions are demeaning and serve to decrease a students' sense of belonging and lessen the student's confidence in their ability to handle the course rigor. These reactions by teachers may be related to their internal assumptions of race that may impact their interactions with students. In reality

regardless of whether race is taught explicitly through the school curriculum, it is taught implicitly in schools and is inherent within all school systems. In turn, students, whether they are conscious of it or not, are dealing with consequences of race and potentially, racism. The salience of race has a greater impact than anything else related to academic achievement. Although race may not be discussed it impacts how we interact with each other, it influences how we understand the world and how children are taught. (Lewis, 2006)

Teachers' perceptions of students as learners can impact student outcomes. Teachers' attitudes toward minority students can be very different from their attitudes towards White students. A significant body of research suggests that 50 percent or more of Whites have unconscious biases that sometimes lead to racial discrimination (Kristof, 2008). Teacher bias may be related to symbolic meaning attached to race, which suggests that Blacks are intellectually inferior to Whites and suggests a distinction between Blackness and intellectual ability (Diamond et al., 2007). Adults may reinforce children's self-perceptions and feelings of superiority or inferiority, especially if teachers seem to favor high achievers or children from particular racial or social class backgrounds (Ferguson, 2001). Black students very early in their schooling, such as kindergarten or even preschool can experience these interactions. The children can internalize the belief that they are not as smart as and will not achieve the success of Whites even if they work hard. When Black students believe that they are not as smart as Whites, this can negatively affect their academic identity (Thompson, 2004).

Teachers need to recognize that their expectations have an effect on their students' concepts of themselves as learners, achievers, and the internalization of negative or positive beliefs about their intelligence. (Flaxman, 2003). John Dovidio, a psychologist at Yale University, noted "Conscious prejudice as measured in surveys has

declined over time. But unconscious discrimination - what psychologists call aversive racism - has stayed fairly constant” (Kristof, 2008). When teachers have negative perceptions of a particular race, this can be communicated verbally and nonverbally to students. Teacher attitudes and negative beliefs can result in low expectations and a non-challenging curriculum contribute to this underachievement (Thompson, 2004). Ability grouping is a potentially discriminatory institutional practice related to teacher perceptions and expectations of Black students that is present in predominantly White and racially diverse suburban public high schools.

Ability Grouping

Ability grouping is one of those routine practices within schools in which teachers’ perceptions and expectations can result in discriminatory actions that are often go unnoticed. Black students are often not recommended for gifted or honors classes because teachers may not perceive them to be intelligent enough to handle these classes. Students observe and are aware of these differences in treatment between White and Black students. Black students’ perceptions of these inequalities can result in behavior and decisions (regarding academics) that are detrimental to their academic achievement. The behavioral differences in Black and White students may be consequential and include behaviors that can be dysfunctional in the school environment and inhibit the learning process. They may also represent subtle differences in students’ perceptions of racial bias, which can give rise to feelings of alienation, and in attitudes about compliance with authority (Ferguson, 2006). Students who may feel powerless to address the racial inequities in the school may choose to act out and/or opt out by dropping out or simply by not engaging in the educational process.

Teachers and guidance counselors are the “gate keepers” who determine which students are selected for enrollment in honors classes. Those students who are not selected for honors classes are tracked into alternative (lower) classes. Oakes (2008) found that the curriculum content, instruction inequality, and classroom climate varied substantially between different tracks. Students scores to college entrance exams could be raised if they were enrolled in higher track classes were they learned skills related to critical thinking, problem solving and creative writing, and mastered the vocabulary. Students in lower tracks completed worksheets on language usage, practiced filling out job applications, focused on rote learning and memorization and were generally taught using workbooks and kits. Teachers however in high track classes spend less time of memorization and more class time on learning (Oakes, 2008).

Alternative classes were established as a part of common institutional practices known as “ability grouping” and “tracking” which create disadvantages that contribute to Black-White academic achievement gap. Adam Gamoran (1992) defines “tracking” as mean broad programmatic divisions that separate students for all academic subjects. For example, high school tracks divide students into academic, general and vocational programs. Elementary schools “track students when they divide them into separate classes for the entire day. Gamoran uses ability grouping to refer to divisions among students for particular subjects, such as special class assignments for math or within-class groups reading. “Ability” strictly speaking however is not usually the criterion for grouping. Rather students are typically divided according to measured or perceived performance (Gamoran, 1992a).

For the purposes of this study, the terms “tracking, leveling and ability grouping” will be used interchangeably to describe the institutional practice of separating students for instruction ostensibly based on their ability. There is no evidence that ability grouping

or tracking has improved overall achievement in schools. Instead, these mechanisms are noted as producing inequality (Gamoran, 1992). As stated by Jeannie Oakes, “Through tracking, schools continue to replicate existing inequality along the lines of race and social class and contribute to intergenerational transmission of social and economic inequality “ (Oakes, 2008).

Despite the absence of evidence to support the use of tracking, it is still a common practice in many public high schools throughout the United States. Tracking continue to be used a legitimate default method for sorting students from early in school career by policy elites in the United States. Many high schools have eliminated the dead end, general tracks, and some now have multiple levels of classes that serve students bound for more and less selective types of colleges, allowing schools to claim that all of their students are college prep (Oakes, 2008).

Since most schools have included student choice as a mode for self-enrollment to honor classes, many educators and researchers blame Black student for not choosing to enroll in honors classes. Shifting the blame to students’ own choices should not excuse schools for providing the often, attractive alternative of classes that do not provide rigorous challenges (Oakes, 2008). The claim that Black students are responsible for their under-representation in honors classes is indicative of what John Ogbu termed as ‘self elimination’. He asserts that Black student self-elimination took three forms:

- 1) Avoidance of honors and advanced placement classes because most of the students in these classes are White.
- 2) Lack of effort in that Black students did not work hard to qualify for higher level courses
- 3) Personal decisions not to enroll in honors or advanced placement classes by students who qualified for placement there (Ogbu, J, 2003, pg. 264).

These potential factors have been used to explain Black student underrepresentation in honors and advanced placement classes, there is however no evidence to substantiate these claims.

When Black and Latino students attend affluent and racially integrated schools, they are more likely to be tracked into less demanding classes, placed in special education courses and are assigned fewer honors and college prep courses than their White and Asian classmates (Roach, 2004). Higher-level classes (gifted, honors, advanced placement) are disproportionately filled with White students, while the lower-level, standard classes are disproportionately filled with Black and other minority students (Tyson, 2011). In predominantly White and racially diverse public schools, guidance counselors or teachers do not place Black students in honors or advanced placement classes. Instead Black students are placed in less academically rigorous classes that have less academic and career rewards. Flaxman's study (2003) indicated parents did not fully understand the consequences of placements, did not adequately prepare their children for academic work, and did not try to countermand the placements. These findings suggest that Black parents are to be blamed for the under-representation of Blacks in honors and advanced classes. It suggests that parents were not knowledgeable about the consequences of placement and did not prepare their children for the rigor of advanced classes and didn't confront the school when their children were not placed. The importance and process for placement in ability groups are not always clearly communicated to parents, especially prior to enrollment in high school.

Ability grouping is conducted (albeit somewhat covertly) in middle and junior high schools. During this period, students are ostensibly grouped according to their abilities in math and english. However, classes offering these subjects at different levels are given the same names making selection confusing. There is no overt labeling of high, medium

or low-level classes, although students are generally aware of the classifications.

White students are more likely to have entered high school with a history of having been selected for high-level math and/or english classes in middle school as well as having participated in gifted programs. Black suburban students, in racially mixed schools, who witness White students being tracked to higher level classes can develop performance anxiety and low expectations for achievement which is manifested from negative stereotypes that they have internalized (Steele, 1999). This researcher posits that experiences with ability grouping may have an affect on academic self-concept and/or can significantly influence students' decisions to enroll or not enroll in honors or advanced placement classes.

Stereotype Threat

Schools have been noted as making Black students predisposed to being anti-intellectual (Roach, 2004). The image of overwhelmingly Black lower-level classes and overwhelmingly White advanced classes send powerful messages to students about ability, race, status and achievement (Tyson, 2011). For Black adolescents, the message of inferiority or incompetence reinforced by subtle racism and lack of educational parity with Whites combine to produce half-hearted attempts at scholarship and the adoption of sophisticated self-handicapping strategies (Welch & Hodges, 1997). Carter (2005) argues that Black students develop "a collective resistance to the White middle-class organization of school or an oppositional identity that perceives schooling as a White domain and high achievement as incongruent with their racial and ethnic identities. As Black students witness the differences in ability grouping experiences of Black and White students, they may feel pressure to protectively dis-identify with school achievement (Schmader, 2008; C. M. Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Stereotypes about Black intellectual ability and the value of education in the Black community are perpetuated by the underrepresentation of Blacks in honors and advanced classes. This underrepresentation is an important and deleterious consequence that is often overlooked (Tyson et al., 2005). Theresa Perry states “the idea of African American intellectual inferiority still exists as part of the “taken for granted notions” of many people in the larger society, irrespective of political orientation” (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). These ideas impact the day to day experiences of students ranging from teacher expectations of them in the classroom, to other students’ perceptions of their intellectual capacity when choosing study groups (Diamond et al., 2007). For some students, the visual image of racial patterns of academic placement may mean little. For others, however, it may be a constant reminder of the cultural system of White superiority, prompting ideas that link Whiteness with certain academic behaviors (Tyson et al., 2005). This under-representation of Blacks in high ability groups (high-level classes) that is witnessed by Blacks as early as kindergarten and throughout their academic experience can cause them to develop inferiority anxiety. This anxiety can be internalized and stems from a lifetime of exposure to society’s negative images about their abilities (C. M. Steele & Aronson, 1995). Inferiority anxiety is a manifestation of stereotype threat that can also lead to Black students dis-identifying with achievement in school and cause them to refrain from enrolling in honors and/or advanced classes.

Global Self-Esteem and Academic Self-Concept

When people talk about self-esteem they are normally referring to global self-esteem because it pertains how people may feel about themselves. This research will not however investigate associations between (global) self-esteem and academic achievement because there are significant differences with global self-esteem and specific attitudes,

such as academic self-concept. Global self-esteem is the individual's high or negative attitude toward the self as a totality (Rosenberg, Schoenbach, Schooler, & Rosenberg, 1995). While most would agree that having positive self-esteem is an important characteristic that has the potential to impact one's general well-being when it comes to schooling and academic performance, it is important to look beyond global self-esteem. Global self-esteem is not a strong indicator of how someone will function in an academic setting. Global self-esteem is more related to psychological welling rather than a specific self-esteem, such as academic self-concept. Although their analysis suggests that raising the academic self-esteem or self-estimated of intelligence among students may increase academic performance, nothing in their findings suggest that raising their levels of global self-esteem or general self-confidence or decreasing their level of self-deprecation would have any such effect.

A study conducted by (Spencer, Cross, Harpalani, & Goss, 2003) addressed the degree to which low-income African American adolescents evolve their own beliefs about self-efficacy as an explanation for school-based performance or whether they accept the assumptions, stereotypes and expectations of others. Positive self-esteem is beneficial, because as noted by Spencer, et al (2003), "students need a positive self-concept in order to motivate themselves toward academic achievement" (Spencer et al., 2003). Their study provided evidence that Black students with positive self-esteem may however have oppositional opinions about White attitudes and values that impact their academic performance. It revealed contrary to assimilation and dominant culture beliefs, high self-esteem was a significant and positive predictor of low eurocentricism (White salient attitudes and values) and a high self-esteem score is not associated with highly Eurocentric racial attitudes. These high-achieving African American adolescents appeared to fail to identify with acting White values and rejected any need for such a

comparison. Therefore positive self-esteem correlated with low value for white values but this did not inhibit students' academic performance. In contrast to John Ogbu's argument, these students did not accept the dominant culture of the school but this did not prevent them from achieving academically. This reinforces my belief of the important role that academic self-concept can play in academic achievement. This researcher believes academic experiences (such high ability grouping) can influence a students' view of their academic ability and impact their academic achievement. It is not necessary however to assimilate and embrace white values in order to have a positive view of yourself as students and believe that you have the mental capacity (ability) to succeed in academically rigorous courses. Several studies have noted that greater academic achievement significant affects self confident and is associated with higher academic self-concept" (Marsh, 1990, Marsh & Shavelson 1985, (Mitchell, 2005).

This study will shed light on the association between academic self-concept, ability grouping and student's course selections. Academic self-concept is defined as the individual's self-concept as the individual's self-perception of their academic ability (internal reference) as well as the individual's assessment of how others in the school setting perceive his or her academic behavior (external reference) (Strein, 1993a). Powell (1989) notes that academic self-concept (i.e., identity) for African American students is directly linked to how well they develop pro-social strategies for coping with racism in schools and how well they overcome obstacles to academic success (as noted by Howard, 2003). Students in racially diverse suburban public high schools observe the racial patterns of in-school segregation that are created by the underrepresentation of Blacks and overrepresentation of White in honors classes. This can result in the internalization and perpetuation of negative stereotypes concerning Black inferior intellectual ability. These students may develop low academic self-concepts and avoid perceived intellectual

challenges (i.e., honor classes) because they believe that they will not do well. In addition, When Black student's have strong (high) academic self-concept they may experience greater pressure from stereotype threat which can cause them worry more about their future (C. Steele, 1999). It may be difficult for these students to overcome their fears that they will not do well in honors and/or advanced classes, which can result in their refraining from enrolled in these classes.

Adolescents become increasingly aware of their identities along racial, gender and academic identities as they enter high school (Welch & Hodges, 1991). As previously noted, students' perceptions of their academic identities also suggest that teachers attitudes have a significant affect on the way students perceive their school experience, their identities, and their academic potential (Howard, 2003). Students may infer negative messages from teachers that result in a self-fulfilling prophecy (Thompson, 2004).

In Marsh and Shavelson's (1985) study, they found that students based their academic self-concepts in particular subjects on how their ability in that subject compares with other students (external comparison) and how their ability in that particular subject compares with their abilities in other subjects (internal comparison) (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Experience with ability grouping may influence how students perceive their academic ability in comparison to other students (academic self-concept) and consequently influence their decision to enroll or not enroll in honors classes. Oakes notes that students placed in average and low track classes do not develop positive attitudes and the grouping – coupled with teachers and peers attitudes – reinforces their self-perception as “average or “low”. This low perception of their intellectual ability may affect their academic self-concept and may be associated with their decision to enroll or not enroll in honors classes (Oakes, 1987).

Researcher Natasha Mitchell investigated the relationship between academic self-concept and academic achievement. Mitchell explored the differences in academic self-concept among first, second and third generation Caribbean immigrants and her findings revealed that there was no substantial difference in academic self-concept between generations. However, the study's findings suggest that for Caribbean immigrants, generational status impacts academic achievement (Mitchell, 2005). These findings may be related to John Ogbu's (1998) belief the "voluntary Blacks", who are Blacks that immigrated to the United States, value education more than "involuntary Blacks", who were brought to the United States as slaves. This research will investigate if there is a difference in the academic self-concept and academic achievement based on generational status.

Student Perceptions

There have been studies conducted which addressed the Black-White academic achievement gap; however, there has been limited research exploring students' perceptions of the factors that influence their course selections. The absence of information addressing the experiences and potential micro-aggressions that may occur daily in the school environment makes it difficult understand problems that may affect the academic achievement of Black and White students in school. It is critical that studies are designed to provide insight and details about students' experiences.

Prior experience with advanced work appears to boost students' academic confidence. However, teachers can also play important role in boosting students' academic confidence. Interactions between teachers and students can result in perceptions by students of their intelligence and ability to do well. Teacher encouragement is an important motivator for Black students. Fergusons' findings concerning encouragement

focused attention on the possibility that effective teacher-student relations may be especially important resources for motivating Black and Hispanic students. Students in the study were asked questions such as “When you work really hard in school, which of the following reasons are more important for you?”. Non-White students and especially Blacks students frequently indicated teacher encouragement was more important than White students did. The emphasis among non-Whites on teacher encouragement, as distinct from teacher demands, suggest the special importance of teacher-student relationships as a source of motivation for Blacks and Hispanics in particular (Ferguson, 2007).

Students are very concerned about the difficulty of the honors classes and they question their ability to succeed in these classes. A study conducted by Tyson et al (2005) revealed that when students were questioned about their course choices, they were overwhelmingly concerned about how well they would do in the class, how much work would be involved, did they have enough academic preparation and amount of work that would be involved. They were more concerned with not failing rather than succeeding. Even the average and lower achieving students wanted to do well in school and this concern may impact their decision to avoid advanced classes in order to ensure that they will do well (Tyson et al., 2005).

Black students may have a desire to achieve academic success; however, they may not actually believe that they are smart enough to handle the rigor of honors classes. The belief that students can do well results from a history of success, achievement, encourage and belief by teachers and parents that they can do well (Ferguson, 2007). Students who have not had the benefit of being selected by a teacher or guidance counselor to enroll in gifted or honors classes may develop a negative mindset about their ability to handle academic challenges.

Research clearly indicates that students' mindsets have strong effects on behaviors that require perseverance such as handling difficult tasks (Farrington, et al., 2002). Students who have sense of belonging within the school environment, as well as feeling capable of succeeding and believing they can master challenging work with effort, are much more likely to enroll in difficult classes. Students who have high ability grouping experiences are able to gain confidence in their ability to rigorous course work. In addition, their perception of their academic ability is strengthened by the fact the teacher and/or guidance counselor who selected them for the advance class also believed that they have the ability to handle the rigorous course work.

Black students in racially diverse suburban public high schools also may not understand the role that honors and advance placement classes play in the college selection process. Guidance counselors and teachers are known to emphasize the importance of having a high grade point average (GPA) however they negate to inform the students of the varying grading scales between college prep, honors and advanced placement classes. The student's perception may be that they will jeopardize or decrease their GPA if they get a lower grade in an honors class.

Howard's (2003) qualitative study of African American student's perceptions of their academic identities at two urban high schools indicated that there is need for researchers to give greater credence to the ways in which young people see schools and the factors within them. It is critically important that future research addressing the conditions of marginalized students give the students an opportunity to share their viewpoint. This study was designed for this purpose, specifically to examine students' perceptions of and experiences with factors that are associated with course enrollment. It gave the Black students' an opportunity to share their viewpoints and perceptions of honors classes. The study also assessed students' academic self concepts and examined

their experiences with ability grouping as well as other factors that may have been associated with their decisions to enroll or refrain from enrolling in honors classes.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter describes the methods and methodology that were used in this study. Mixed methods were employed in a naturalistic setting. A mixed methods design includes collecting both quantitative and qualitative data (Portney, 2000). The mixed methods study design was used to because one research method could not adequately address all study questions. This approach allowed the researcher to examine students' academic self-concepts, perceptions of honors, and academic experiences as well as a myriad of confounding variables such as generational status, length of time families lived in the district and socioeconomic indicators.

Research Design

Mixed methods were used to identify perceptions and experiences in a racially diverse suburban public high school that could affect Black students' course selection decisions. This researcher investigated factors that could influence Black suburban students' decisions to enroll or not enroll in honors and advanced classes at West Orange High School. In particular, student perceptions were explored because they affect behavior and can impact decision concerning course selection and enrollment. The research questions, which were administered in Component #2 (survey) and measurements utilized to evaluate these questions, were as follows. Are students' academic self-concepts associated with their enrollment in honors classes?" This question was evaluated by comparing student's class selections to their academic self-concept scores. Are students' academic self-concepts associated with their experiences with ability grouping? An examination of student's academic self-concepts scores and student's experiences with ability grouping evaluated this question. Are students' perceptions of honors courses associated with their academic self-concept? An

examination of student's academic self-concept scores and their perceptions of honor's classes evaluated this question. Responses to the following questions were used to evaluate the students' perceptions of honor classes. Why do you think students fail honors classes? Why do you think students succeed in honors classes? What advice would give another student about enrolling in honors classes? Do you think that colleges are influenced by honors enrollment? This research also questioned whether students' perceptions of honors courses are associated with their enrollment in honors classes. This question was evaluated by examining student perceptions of honors classes and the classes they current class enrollment. Are students' perceptions of honors courses associated with their experiences with ability grouping? This question was evaluated by examining student perceptions of honors classes and their experiences with ability grouping. Another research question was "Are students' enrollments in honors and or advanced classes associated with their experiences with ability grouping"? This question was evaluated by examining students' class selections and their experiences with ability grouping.

In addition to the above research questions, the following confounding variables were also examined in this exploratory research: gender, ethnicity, generational status, socio-economic status – homeownership, parents educational background, free or reduced lunch, and length of time in district.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model (Figure 1- below) depicts potential factors that the researcher believed could influence student class enrollment. It illustrates the potential for enrollment in honors to be influenced or predicted by tracking experience, parents, academic self-concept as well as their perceptions of honors. The role that these factors

play in the course selection process is of critical importance to this study.

Ability grouping

This model illustrates the potential impact that ability grouping experiences, in particular being in high groups or low level groups can have on a student's belief in their academic ability and ultimately their decision to enroll or refrain from enrolling in honors or advanced classes. This conceptual model also suggests that ability-grouping experiences influence student's perceptions.

Student Perceptions

Student perceptions of the role and importance of honors and/or advanced classes can be impacted by their experience of being selected or not selected for high ability groups in elementary or middle school. A student who was placed in a high ability group in elementary school or middle school may have a better understanding of honors or advanced classes because their academic experience in higher classes are considered by guidance counselors as pre-requisites for enrollment in advanced classes in high school. Additionally, students who are placed in high ability groups may have a better perception of advanced classes because they are accustomed to challenging academics and have a history of success in rigorous course work.

Academic Self-Concept

This model suggests there are two primary factors that can impact a student's academic self-concept. One fact can affect a students' academic self-concept is whether they were selected to participate in a high ability group. Experience with high ability grouping can instill self-confidence in a student's beliefs in their academic abilities. A student who was placed in high achieving classes may have a higher academic self-concept than a student

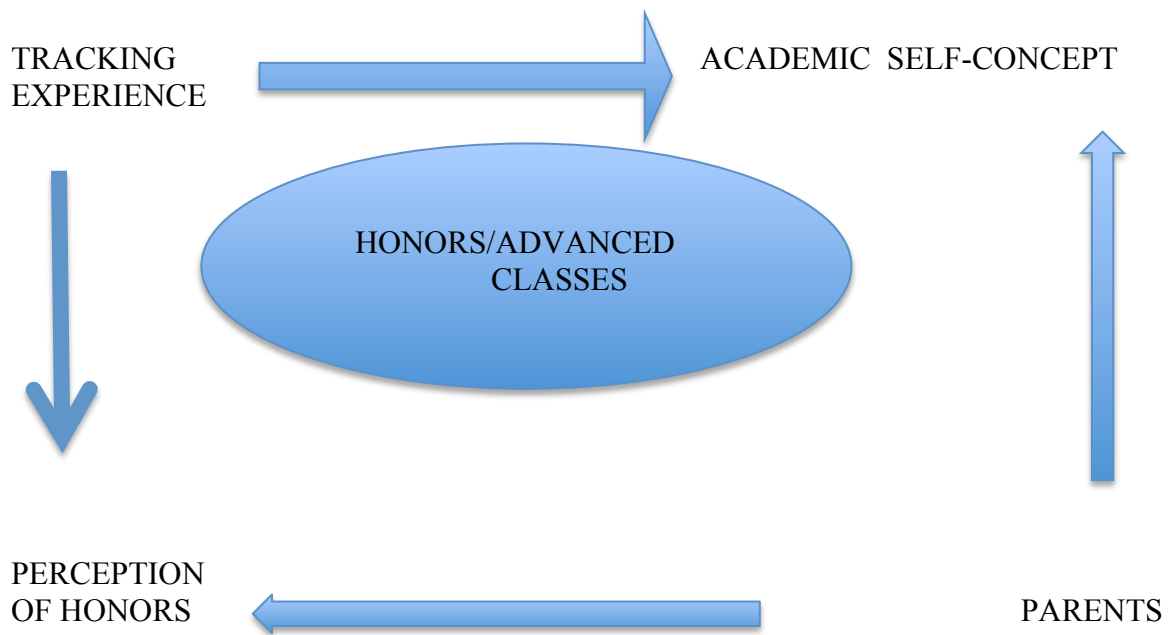
who was placed in a lower level group. The fact that the school's staff (teachers or guidance) placed them in high achieving classes demonstrates their belief in the student's academic abilities. Conversely students who were not placed in high achieving may possess self-doubt of the academic abilities.

Parents are depicted in this model as having an impact on student's academic self-concept. Student's confidence in academic abilities can be influenced by the information communicated by their parents. Parents can bolster their children's self-confidence by sharing positive and affirmative comments about their academic performance and belief in their inherent intelligence.

Both of the factors can ultimately serve to influence students' confidence in their academic abilities and impact their course selections. Students with high ability grouping experiences may be more likely to enroll in honors and/or advance classes because of a strong academic self-concept resulting from their history of success in high achieving classes. Conversely students who were placed in lower level ability groups may be reluctant to enroll in advanced classes because they do not have history of achievement in higher classes. However, students who are not selected for high ability groups can still have a strong academic self-concept because their parents have instilled a strong sense of belief in their intelligence. Therefore this model suggests that even if student does not experience high ability grouping they may still enroll in honors because of self-confidence in their academic abilities that was instilled by their parents.

Parents

Parents also can influence a student's perception of honors classes by communicating the importance and advantages that can be gained from this level of instructions. Students perceptions of honors can be positively influenced by their parents and can result in their choosing to enroll in honors or advanced clas

Figure 1: Conceptual Model**Methodology**

The researcher gained permission to conduct this study from the West Orange School District and Rutgers University's Institutional Review Board. The superintendent met with the researcher and granted approval for the research to be conducted at West Orange High School. An email was sent to the principal of West Orange High School from the superintendent informing him of the research and that permission had been granted (Appendix A). The researcher met with the principal of the high school, who put the researcher in touch with the Small Learning Communities project director. The project director facilitated communication with the English teachers and assisted in the recruitment of students for individual interviews (Component #1) and the survey completion (Component #2).

Interviews (qualitative research)

In Component #1, interviews were conducted to gather information and probe the student's experiences and perceptions. The interview method of qualitative research was used as a tool to obtain information about the student's academic experiences and identify those perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that could be associated with their decisions to enroll or not enroll in honors and advanced classes. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of students' academic experiences and how these experiences affected their decisions to enroll or refrain from enrolling in honors and advanced classes. The students were asked about their experiences with ability grouping. They were asked to identify whether or not they had been in high academic classes during elementary or middle school. Several questions were asked about the process for enrolling in honors and advanced classes. The researcher asked the following questions about the enrollment process. What are some of the reasons why chose to enroll or not enroll in honors classes? Did your teachers or guidance counselors discuss with you whether or not you should enroll in honors classes? If they did, what did they tell you about honors classes? Did you enroll in the classes they recommended? If not, why not, did your parents enroll in an honors class that was not recommended by a teacher or guidance counselor? How do you think your parents influenced you in your decision to enroll or not enroll in honor classes? In order to gain insight to students' perceptions of honor classes, perceptions of discrimination and perceptions of their intelligence, the researcher asked the following questions during the interviews. Why do you think people succeed or fail in honors classes? Why do you think people succeed or fail in honors classes? Do you think that taking honors classes influences the colleges to which students apply? What advice would you give a student who is trying to decide whether or not to enroll in an honors class? Who or what

influenced you to take or not take honors classes? What criteria do you think teachers use to determine who should be recommended for honors classes? Have you ever been treated differently or unfairly in school because of your race? Can you describe an experience where you witnessed students being treated differently based on race? Do you feel that teachers have the same expectations of all students? Why or why not? How would you describe your intellectual ability? How do you see yourself intellectually in comparison to other students? Do you feel that teachers treat students differently based on their intellectual ability? The researcher concluded the interviews by asking the students if there was any additional information that they would like to share

Participants

Participants were recruited from ninth and tenth grade English classes at West Orange High School in West Orange, New Jersey. The students represented all levels of English classes. English classes were selected because this is a subject that is required for graduation by all students. Even more importantly this is a subject in which ability grouping (tracking) is conducted by teachers and guidance counselors prior to high school, which can have an impact on a student's course selection. Ninth and tenth graders were selected for this study because in these grades parents, students, guidance counselors and/or teachers have the ability to select students for enrollment in honors classes. By the eleventh and twelfth grade, students have advanced beyond honor classes and are at a point where they have the option of selecting advanced placement (AP) classes. Normally only students who were enrolled in correlating pre-requisite honors classes during the 9th or 10th grade can be enrolled in AP classes. Although students can select and enroll in AP classes without previous enrollment in honors classes, this is strongly discouraged because these students have not experienced the rigor inherent in honors classes. They also would not have been taught all of the pre-requisite material

that would be necessary for advanced classes. So although students and their parents can enroll in AP without recommendations from guidance counselors or teachers, this is rarely done and is not advisable because such students would be placed at a considerable learning disadvantage. However, enrollment in 9th and 10th grade honors courses can be the choice of the parent or student without faculty recommendation because there are no pre-requisite courses.

Research Procedure

Component #1: Interviews

Component #1 consisted of semi-structured interviews with Black male and female ninth or tenth grade students enrolled in all levels of English classes at West Orange High School in West Orange, New Jersey. With the assistance of classroom teachers and school administrators, ten (10) ninth and tenth grade students were recruited to participate in this study. A letter (Appendix B) explaining the purpose of the study and included the parental consent form was given to each student. Students were informed that parents' signatures were required to participate in the study. The first ten (10) students who returned the signed parental consent form were permitted to participate in the study. Students who did not return the parental consent were excluded from the survey process. Student assent was established by returning the signed assent forms (Appendix C). Prior to each interview, the students were reminded that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any anytime and that their identity be kept confidential and anonymous.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in school library during the interviewees' respective lunch periods. Open-ended questions (Appendix D) were use to obtain information and identify perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that are associated with

students' decisions to enroll or not enroll in honors classes. These interviews allowed the participants to record their perceptions of their intellectual abilities, teacher expectations, and honors classes, as well as their experiences with ability grouping. Students were given ample time to respond to the interview questions, and when needed, additional questions were asked by the researcher and/or student for clarification. All students who participated in the interviews were given \$5 gift cards for Burger King. A unique identification number was assigned to all student interviews. Anonymity was maintained during data analysis of the interviews.

These interviews were used to test the language that would be used in a subsequent survey instrument. During the interview process, students were able to ask for clarification of questions and this information was used to modify the survey instrument so that it was more effective and user friendly.

Interview Analysis

The initial analysis of Component #1 consisted of a description of the demographics of the study population. This included a statistical breakdown of the number of students, number of students in honor courses, number of students not in honor courses, and the number of students by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and length of time in district. Interview recordings were uploaded to transcription software and transcribed. Once the data was transcribed, it was downloaded to qualitative data management software "NVIVO" which was used to code the qualitative data, and identify and sort common themes. These themes were then compiled and analyzed. The students' responses to the interviews open ended questions were informative and provided the interviewer with useful information that should be included in the online survey. For instance, those students who were enrolled in honors classes informed the

researcher that they generally did not use textbooks and that their primary instructional tools were worksheets. Based on these responses, the researcher decided to include an inquiry about teaching materials on the online survey.

Research Procedure

Component #2 - Surveys

In Component #2 of this research study a mixed methods survey was compiled and completed by 128 students through the utilization of an online cloud-based survey tool Survey Monkey. The survey was used to obtain an understanding of the student's perceptions of honors classes, experiences with tracking and an assessment of their academic self-concepts. It allowed the researcher to gain insight to confounding variables that may influence student's decisions such as their generational status and length of time they have lived in the district.

Survey Instrument

This researcher could not find an instrument that had been designed to obtain information addressing Black student perceptions and experiences that impact their enrollment in honors classes in racially diverse suburban schools. An exhaustive search of literature revealed that a standardized instrument appropriate for this study does not exist. Fortunately, the search revealed an academic self-concept scale, which was designed to measure the academic facet of general self-concept. Additional sections were designed and added to this instrument to create a mixed methods survey. The survey instrument was divided into four sections: academic self-concept; perceptions of honors classes; academic experiences and demographics.

Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept was measured through the utilization of the Academic Self-Concept Scale (ASCS) created by Dr. William Reynolds (Reynolds, 1988). This academic self-concept scale was administered because it is an established tool that has been used to measure academic self-concept. The researcher contacted Dr. Reynolds prior to the writing of the proposal. He granted approval to include this scale in the research study (see Appendix E). The validity of the scale was established in Dr. Reynolds's initial validation study by correlating it to Grade Point Average (GPA) and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. There was a satisfactory correlation of the ASCS with the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (0.45, $P < 0.001$) and GPA (0.40, $P < 0.001$). Reynolds' (1988) study also confirmed previous findings regarding the validity of the instrument.

The ASCS is a 40 item, 4-point Likert-type scale that measures the academic facet of general self-concept. An internal consistency was of 0.91 was reported in 1980 (Reynolds et al) and Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.92 was reported in 1988 (Reynolds). Dr. Reynolds used the ASCS to determine the academic self-concept of college students; however, this scale was adapted to evaluate high school students for this study. Minor wording changes were made to make the scale appropriate for high school use. The term "college" was replaced with term "school"; "instructors were replaced with "teachers"; "majors" was replaced by "classes".

This instrument (see Appendix F) was used to survey and assess the academic self-concepts of 95 Black ninth and tenth grade students at West Orange High School. Survey results were analyzed to categorize students according to high, medium and low academic self-concept, and to identify their enrollment in college prep versus honors classes. This information was used to identify students' academic self-concepts and evaluate if differences in the student's academic self-concepts influenced their decisions

to enroll or not enroll in honors classes.

Student Perceptions

The second section of the survey consisted of open-ended questions that were designed to capture information regarding students' perceptions of honors classes and intellectual abilities. Students provided their perceptions and opinions about the following:

1) Why do students succeed or fail in honors classes? 2) What advice would you give to students who are considering enrolling in honors classes? 3) Are colleges influenced by students taking honors classes? 4) How would you describe your intellectual ability/intelligence (i.e., are you smart, very smart, average)? 5) How would you describe your intelligence in comparison to other students?

Academic Experiences

The third section contained questions that were utilized to obtain information about students' academic experiences, specifically addressing ability grouping and enrollment in in-school academic programs designed to improve their academic achievement.

Demographic Information

The survey included a demographic section capturing gender, age, ethnicity, generational status, length of time in district, grade level, and socio-economic status determined by the following three factors: parents educational level, homeownership and number of parents living in the household. The length of time the student has lived in the district was examined because there are many students who enter the district in the latter of part of their secondary school experience. In her capacity as a member of the West Orange Board of Education, this researcher has encountered concerns that students who transfer into the district are generally ill prepared because they are coming from urban

areas and that this is the cause of their poor performance in the West Orange School District. Brofenbrenner (1979) has noted that changes like this in students' educational setting can lead to disruptions that impact academic performance. It is therefore useful to examine the relationship between the length of time in district and enrollment in honors and institutes.

Survey Implementation

Survey instrument was used to understand those factors that influence student course-taking decisions and it allowed this researcher to obtain feedback from students. The researcher uploaded the entire survey instrument into the Survey Monkey software. The researcher received approval to use this survey instrument and conduct the research for Component #2 of this study from Rutgers University's Institutional Review Board. I met with the small communities project director at West Orange High School who facilitated communication with the English teachers and assisted in the recruitment of students to complete surveys. The project director solicited the assistance of English teachers and school administrators to recruit ninth and tenth grade students to participate in this study. A letter explaining the purpose of the study along a parental consent form (Appendix G) was given to each student. Students were informed that parents' signatures were required to participate in the study. When the students returned the signed parental consent form, they were given the online link to the survey and permitted to participate in the study. Students who did not return the parental consent were excluded from the survey process. Student assent was documented in the first page of the online survey established by their completion of the survey. The first paragraph of the online survey informed the students that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw (by not submitting the completing the survey online) at any anytime and that their identity be

kept confidential and anonymous. All of the 9th and 10th grade students (regardless of race) at West Orange High School were invited to participate in this online survey. A total of 128 surveys were completed.

Component #2 - Survey Analysis

Initial statistical analysis consisted of a compilation of the demographic data of the study population. This included an analysis of number of students in honors, institutes and non-honor classes in relationship to the number of students by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and length of time in district. Academic self-concept scale scores, experiences with ability grouping and perception of course selection category, also stratified the students' responses.

Dr. Reynold's scoring grid (see Appendix H) was used to calculate the total academic self-concept score for each participant. In addition, self-confidence and self-doubt were identified through oblique factor loading for within factor item content utilizing the following descriptors:

ASCS IV – represents self-confidence in academics (items -10,23,16) and; ASCS VI – defined by items indicative of self-doubt regarding ability (items – 11, 30, 39, 21, 14, 24, 26, 5).

NVIVO, qualitative software, was utilized to analyze and quantify the qualitative questions related to student perceptions of honors classes and intelligence. The qualitative data from the open ended questions included in the survey were uploaded to the NVIVO. The data was reviewed and common themes were identified and coded. The coded data was inputted to Excel software along with the other data from the surveys. SAS 9.2 and SPSS were for used for quantitative analysis to compare academic self-

concept, experience with ability grouping, enrollment in honors classes, as well as perceptions of honors and intelligence. T- tests and ANOVA were used to assess differences in ASC Scores based on different groups. Logistic regression was used to estimate the odds ratio of students' enrollment in honors courses based on level of academic self-concept, experience with ability grouping (tracking) and perception of course selection. The odds ratio was re-estimated for these variables after adjusting for gender, ethnicity, generational status, socio-economic status, and length of time in district. Cross-tabs with Fisher's exact p-value were used because many of the expected sizes were less than five.

Chapter 4: Research Setting

West Orange, New Jersey is a three (300) year-old suburban, urban rim community whose residents reflect a wide variation in income, ethnicity, education and interests. It is primarily a residential community with approximately 46,000 residents living in about 4,500 dwellings units, the majority of which are single homes. The Census Bureau 2006-2010 American Community Survey reported the median household income as \$88,917.00 and median family income as \$106,742. The demographics of the town are noted as 57.15 percent White, 26.58 percent Black, 16.20 percent Hispanics and 7.96 percent Asian (Bureau, 2006-2010).

One of the town's jewels is its' public school system. West Orange High School was cited by the Washington Post journalist Jay Matthew's *Class Struggle: What's Wrong and Right with America's Best Public High Schools*, as among the top 1 percent of public high schools in the nation (Matthew, 2002). The West Orange school district has seven public elementary schools, three middle schools and one high school. The median teacher salary was \$62,451.00. During the 2013-2014 school year, there were 11 students per teacher and 282 students per administrator, according the NJ School Performance Report 2013-2014.

The town demographics show the population to be predominantly White (57% White). The demographics of the high school student body, however, do not mirror the demographics of the town. This will be further explored in Table: 1, which illustrates the vast difference between the demographics of the town and the demographics of the high school.

Table 1: Demographics of Town versus High School Population

Race	Township Population*	High School Population**
White	57.15%	20.8%
Black	26.58%	48.2%
Hispanic	16.20%	23%
Asian	7.96%	6.5%

*Census 2010

**NJ School Performance Report 2013-2014

Many White families send their children to private schools such as Newark Academy in Livingston, New Jersey and Seton Hall Preparatory School, a private male high school located in West Orange. High school demographics are also impacted by the fact that West Orange has a large Jewish population and the majority of their children attend Kushner Academy, a private institution also located in Livingston, New Jersey. (Livingston is a suburb that borders West Orange).

West Orange High School is comprised of grades nine through twelve and there were 2118 students in West Orange High School, during the 2013-2014 school year. The demographics of the high school population in this District (*according to the NJ School Performance Report 2013-14*) were 48% Black, 20% White, 7% Asian and 23% Hispanic. The report also indicated that 38% of the students in the high school were identified as “economically disadvantaged. New Jersey School Performance Report provides data that identifies where students are attending college 16 months after graduation from high school. This report data for West Orange High School revealed that 83 % of Whites were enrolled in 4-year colleges compared to only 63% of Black

students. At West Orange High School, 62% of Whites' New Jersey Biology Competency test scores revealed "Proficiency" whereas only 46% of Blacks achieved "Proficiency" (*NJ School Performance Report 2013-2014*).

Ability Grouping in the West Orange School District

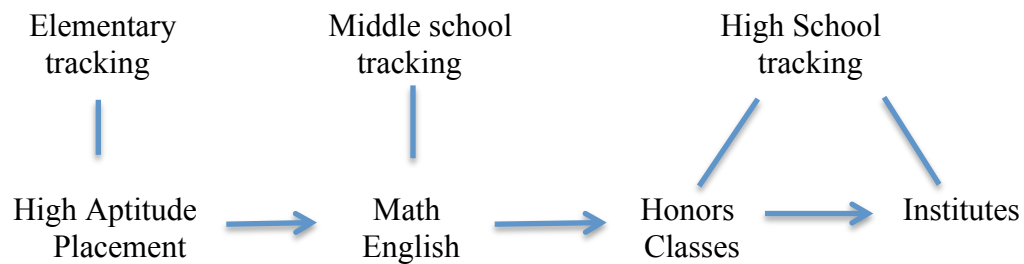
Elementary Schools - High Aptitude Placement (HAP)

The West Orange school district uses the practice of "ability grouping" in all of their schools from elementary through high school. In elementary school, students in grades 3-7 are selected for participation in the High Aptitude Program (HAP) for gifted and Talented Students. Classroom teacher or principals nominate these students, for participation in HAP. The HAP committee uses the following selection criteria to evaluate the nominated students: Standardized test scores, West Orange Scale of Performance Criteria and Teacher Judgment Scale. These students in grades 3,4, and 5 are taken off campus to the Administration Building for separate instruction for two to three hours. Students in middle school receive additional instruction at home daily for 40-45 minutes.

Middle Schools

Ability grouping is also experienced in middle schools Language Arts (Reading) and Mathematics classes. Guidance counselors or teachers group students in high, low or medium classes in math and reading. This leveling practice is not documented in the school curriculum. It is, however, a practice that is well known by teachers, staff and students. Figure 2 illustrates the ability grouping practices at West Orange High School

Figure 2: Ability grouping practices at West Orange High School



West Orange High School

Several of the inequities that appear in the Black-White academic achievement gap in West Orange High School are evident honors class enrollment and are even more apparent in the small learning communities that have been established by the district.

Small Learning Communities

West Orange High School has several small learning communities that are defined as “academic communities within a school, which focus on a concentrated area of study while preparing learners for postsecondary education and labor force related skills” (WOHS Curriculum Bulletin, 2013-2014). These small learning communities are essentially a method of “ability grouping” currently being utilized at West Orange High School. West Orange High School implemented the first small learning community in the late 1980s. The small learning community program has expanded since this time and currently there are several small learning communities (WOHS, Internet) Each small learning community has an application process and focuses on different areas of study that are detailed in the curriculum. However, Horizons is the exception to this rule.

Horizons

According to the online description (WOHS, Internet), Horizons is a small learning community designed to maximize the academic and social growth of a students who, despite their intellectual ability, have not performed up to their own expectations and the expectations of their parents and the professionals who have taught them. Some students enter the program in their freshman year following a referral by their middle school team and a review process by the Horizons staff. Other students enter the program in their sophomore year following a referral by a faculty member, guidance counselor or parent and a review process by the Horizon staff. The Horizons program is set up as a separate part of the school campus with its own entrance. The students who were interviewed in this study reported that the population in Horizons is over 90% Black. One of the students interviewed in study was enrolled in Horizons and she reported that being in Horizons made her feel alienated from the rest of the students in the school.

AVID

The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) small learning community is a program for students in the academic middle. The AVID program involves an application and interview process. The selection criteria indicate that students must have a 2.0 -3.0 grade point average, and average to high test scores. The student must the first their family to go to college and show a willingness to prepare for demanding course requirements. They must be motivated and determined to achieve goals and demonstrate the potential to improve academically. According the West Orange Curriculum Bulletin (2013-2014), the number of students selected for this program will be limited and parents of students in the program must be willing to be active participants in the program. The program is designed to prepare students for placement in honors and AP classes. The

program consists of a yearly elective course offering that focuses on college readiness, tutoring and organizational skills.

Institutes

Institutes represent another level of “ability grouping” implemented in West Orange High School in 2009. The Institute of Mathematics and Science, also known as the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Academy; The Institute of Humanities; and The Institute of Citizen Empowerment each provide their own honors classes within the respective institute. Students can apply to these programs during the 8th or 9th grade. The applicants are evaluated and scored based on the following categories: grades in core subject areas, standardized testing results, teacher recommendations and a student-developed writing sample. All of the Institute’s curriculums have separate honors classes and culminate in advancement to advanced placement classes in 11th or 12th grade.

Honors classes

Honors classes are not documented or identified as a part of a small learning community unless they are the separate honors classes offered within the Institutes. The West Orange Curriculum does not have a section addressing a procedure for enrollment of honors classes. Therefore, self-selection and/or parent selection is permitted. The curriculum describes all the honors within the context of general descriptions of all courses. Parents, however, are verbally informed during high school orientation, which takes place during the 8th grade, that their teachers and guidance counselors will recommend students for honors classes. Another barrier or concern that may impact a parent or student’s perceptions of honors classes is that in the West Orange Curriculum Honors English,

Honors Geometry and Honors Algebra are described as “accelerated” and “fast paced” courses.

Academic disparities are clearly evident in the fact that West Orange High School students who are enrolled in many of small learning communities, such as Horizons and the Institutes School, generally experience what Carolyn Tyson termed as “in-school segregation”. Although the white students in the high school only represented 19% of the high school population (*NJ School Performance Report 2013-2014*) every Institute within the high school reflects a majority of white student enrollment. In sharp contrast, Horizons is a small learning (*remedial*) community within the high school in which over 95% of the students are minorities. The classrooms and students in this program are segregated from the general school population.

The quality of education provided to the students at West Orange High School has been a great concern of the community residents. As a result, in February 2011, the West Orange Board of Education contracted LCW Consultants to conduct a review of equity practices in the school district. The members of the Board expressed a strong commitment to providing all students with the highest possible quality education. The Consultants were encouraged to help the Board gain an increased understanding of the perceptions of the school community related to equity and to make recommendations that would be helpful to them and the Superintendent (Consultants, 2011, p. 4).

The Consultants gathered information on the perceptions of parents, teachers, students, administrators and community members regarding Board of Education policies; school culture including staffing; professional development; curriculum materials; community and parent relations. There were generally positive findings. The consultants’ recommendations addressed additional ways to publicize Board of Education policies. The report indicated a need for professional development for teachers on understanding

and responding to cultural differences and professional development for Board of Education members. It identified the need to ensure inclusion of multicultural elements in the formal curriculum as well as greater consistency across schools regarding the number and variety of multicultural events. It was suggested a review of the current textbook needs be conducted and development of a prioritized list of textbooks that need replacement. Communication with school community members on new channels for supporting diversity should be conducted. An expansion of the recruitment to hire highly qualified candidates who also represent the diverse student population. The last recommendation included a comment that “All focus group findings discussed the need for greater diversity among the teaching staff”.

The findings in their study did not however address the fact that Black students are underrepresented in honors and advanced classes. The report did not even mention the racial imbalance that is inherent in Horizons and Institutes. There is clearly still a need to investigate the structural inequalities that are evident in Black-White academic achievement gap in this school district.

**Chapter 5: Black suburban students talk about their academic experiences
and voice their opinions about honors and advanced classes**

This chapter will present the results of the individual semi-structured interviews that were conducted in Component #1 of this research study. These interviews were designed to obtain insight and give voice to Black suburban student's perception of honors classes in a racially diverse high school. From October 11, 2013 through November 6th, 2013 semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten (10) Black students at West Orange High School. Six (6) ninth graders and four (4) tenth graders were interviewed. All of the students were interviewed individually in the school library during their lunch periods. The interviews took approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. Prior to each interview, the researcher reminded the students that their participation was voluntary that they could withdraw at any anytime and that their identity would be kept confidential and anonymous.

Demographic data from interviews (Component #1)

The researcher initially reviewed the demographic data findings pertaining to the semi-structured interviews. An analysis was conducted to identify and compare the study participant's perceptions and experiences relative to their enrollment in institutes, honors class and non-honors classes (see Table 2 – Demographic data by course enrollment).

TABLE: 2 Demographic Data by Course Enrollment***INSTIT= Institute**

N = 10	INSTIT N	INSTIT %	HONORS N	HONORS N	NON- HONORS N	NON- HONORS %
Total:	6	60%	2	20%	2	20%
Grade:						
9 th	3	30%	2	20%	1	10%
10 th	3	30%	0	0%	1	10%
Gender:						
Female	5	50%	1	10%	2	20%
Male	1	10%	1	10%	0	0%
Ethnicity:						
Black - African American	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%
Black (Not African American)	4	40%	2	20%	2	20%
Student U.S. Born:	6	60%	2	20%	2	20%
Maternal Birthplace						
U.S.	2	20%	0	0%	1	10%
Non-U.S.	4	40%	2	20%	1	10%
Paternal Birthplace						
U.S.	4	40%	1	10%	0	0%
Non-U.S.	2	20%	1	10%	2	20%
Tracking:	4	40%	2	20%	1	10%
Years in District:						
More than 7 years	3	30%	1	10%	1	10%
4-6 years	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%
1-3 years	1	10%	0	0%	1	0%
Less than 1 year	0	0%	1	10%	0	0%

	INSTITUT N	INSTITUTE %	HONORS N	HONORS %	NON- HONORS N	NON- HONORS %
Homeownership:						
Own	4	40%	1	10%	1	10%
Rent	1	10%	0	0%	1	10%
Don't know	1	10%	1	10%	0	0%
Family Composition						
Single Mom	3	30%	1	10%	0	0%
Both Parents	3	30%	1	10%	2	20%
Parental Education:						
High School Degree	0	0%	0	0%	2	20%
Some College	1	10%	1	10%	0	0%
Bachelor's Degree	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Master's or Prof. Degree	5	50%	1	10%	0	0%

Six of the ten students interviewed were enrolled in an institute and two of the students were enrolled in honors. Two of the students were not enrolled in honors classes. One of these students was enrolled in Horizons. All of students who were enrolled in an institute indicated they were taking honors classes.

Grade & Gender

Sixty percent of the interviewees were in 9th grade and 40% were in 10th grade. Eight of the ten students who participated in the interviews were female. Only two male students were selected. One of these Black male interviewees was enrolled in honors and the other was enrolled in an institute.

Ethnicity and Generational Status

One of the confounding variables that were examined during the research was “generational status”. Generational status is based on the student and/or parent’s migration to the United States. This researcher included these variables because previous studies (Mitchell, 2005 & Ogbu, 1998) indicate that generational status may impact academic achievement and these students may have more trust in and value of the educational system.

Although all ten of the study participants were born in the United States, six out of the ten identified themselves as Caribbean, West Indian or African. Five of these six students, who identified themselves as Caribbean, West Indian or African, were enrolled in honors classes and/or an institute. A review of the mother’s birthplaces revealed that the majority of the study participants were first generation Americans. Seven of the ten student’s interviewed mothers were born in the Caribbean, West Indies or Africa. Six of these (first generation) students were enrolled in honors and/or an institute.

Socioeconomic Status

The data related to homeownership revealed that six of the ten interview participants’ parents owned their homes. Two parents rented their homes and two students did not know if they rented or owned. Five of the six participants whose parents owned their home were enrolled in honors and/or an institute.

Data pertaining to parental education revealed that the majority (six out of eight) of the students’ enrolled in honors and/or an institute parents possessed a master’s or professional degree. Parents of the two students who were not enrolled in honors classe, parents possessed only a high school degree.

This data suggests that socioeconomic status may be related to academic achievement because 83% of the homeowner's children were enrolled in honors classes and 75% of the parents of students, enrolled in honors classes, possessed a master's or professional degree.

High Ability Grouping

The confluence of high ability grouping (which refers to student's who had been placed in high aptitude placement classes, high reading and/or high math) during elementary or middle school, with academic self-concept and student perceptions is of primary interest in this research study. A review of the interviews revealed that the majority of the interview participants who were enrolled in honors (seven out of eight) had previous high ability grouping experiences. In addition, six of the seven students with high ability grouping were also enrolled in institutes. This data appears to support this researcher's hypothesis that tracking (ability grouping experience) influences student's course selections and decisions to enroll or not enroll in honors and advanced classes. In summary, the interview data suggests that high ability grouping experiences seem to be related to an increased likelihood to enroll in honors and/or advanced classes. However, this small sample of ten (10) students is only suggestive, and cannot provide proof of this hypothesis on its own.

Qualitative Data (Component #1)

Student Perceptions

The following section, presents a summary of the students' responses to the open-ended questions included during the semi-structured interviews. These responses were instrumental in helping the researcher to achieve a better understanding of issues related to the students' perceptions of their intelligence, school honors and advanced classes, and their own academic experiences. The findings obtained during these interviews were also used to inform and modify the on-line survey instrument in Component #2 of this study.

Importance of Honors Classes

Students' consistently reported believing that enrolling in honors classes would influence one's ability to be accepted into college. Some of the interviewees stated that colleges would consider an honors student as capable of handling challenges in college. Others were aware that honors classes had to be taken in order to enroll in advance placement (AP) classes later in their high school career. They noted that certain colleges and universities expect applicants to have taken AP classes. Students reported that it was important to select honors classes in subjects that perform they well in. One student reported a desire to become an anesthesiologist so she enrolled in honors biology. However, not being good at math, so she chose to enroll in non-honors math. These statements reflect the findings in *It Aint a Black Thing*, which indicated that all students select classes based on their ability to do well (Tyson et al., 2005).

Researcher: What are some of the reasons why you chose enroll or not enroll in honors classes?

Student: I wanted a challenge because I like challenges. I like learning new things at a higher level and I think HAP helped challenge me and other students to be

like in an environment where everybody else is being challenged too. Kind of a competitive atmosphere in a way and honors is obviously a good thing for colleges to look at so that's another reason too.

Researcher: What advice would you give a student who is trying to decide whether or not to enroll in an honors class?

Student: I would tell them to ask themselves this one question. Will you back down if someone gives you something hard? Are going to say no, you can't do it? Instead of trying as hard as you can no matter what they give you then enroll. But if you know you'll do it half way don't do it.

Honors Enrollment Process

The majority of students indicated that guidance counselor and teacher recommendations were required to enroll in honors classes. They also believed that teachers select students for honors and advanced classes based on the student's grades. Several students felt that teachers judge students' willingness to work hard. Interestingly, several students did note that teachers' decisions are often based on subjective criteria, such as how students act, their personalities and their behavior. One student indicated "If a person doesn't have good grades but his behavior is good, a teacher will put them in honors". This could be indicative of the influence that the teacher subjectivity could have on whether a student is recommended for honors or institute enrollment. It is possible that Black male students may be less likely to be given this opportunity (to be selected for honors and advanced classes) because they are often perceived to have problems with their behavior. This is an area where stereotype threat may play a role in the course

selection/enrollment process. Students may be treated stereotypically and/or subjectively based on teacher bias.

Researcher: What criteria do you think teachers use to determine who should be recommended for honors classes?

Student: Well there's the strength in our personality like our English teacher he looks at our personalities not only our grades. If he thinks we try hard enough even when don't get the best grades, he looks at how hard we try and if we really want it.

Researcher: What criteria do you think teachers use to determine who should be recommended for honors classes?

Student: How well they (students) perform in class. Not grade wise but like behavior. Like if someone doesn't have that good a grade but like their behavior is well good, then it's easier learn, like the teacher will put them in honors classes and like push them a little harder and try like getting their grades better than just put them below in a class where they just get stuck.

Researcher: Well what do you think teachers use to determine that? Do they look at their grades or is it the student behavior?

Student: I think it's their behavior

Researcher: In terms of like, do they pay attention, are they focused like and are they motivated to do work?

These responses provided by the students during their individual interviews that reflect the students' perceptions of subjectivity in teachers' determination of who should be enrolled in honors classes.

Additionally one of the two students who were not enrolled in honor indicated being unaware that their parents could have requested that they be placed in honors classes. The other student indicated that they wished that they known this because they would have welcomed the opportunity and challenge.

Researcher: Would you have been able to put yourself (in honors)? You felt that you needed a teacher's recommendation in order to be placed in honors? Is that right?

Student: Yes

Researcher: Did you know that you could enroll yourself in an honors class without a teacher's recommendation?

Student: I didn't know that

Researcher: That you could enroll yourself in honors?

Student: Yes

Researcher: If it were possible for you to enroll yourself (in honors)? Would you have enrolled yourself?

Student: Yes

Researcher Do you think you would have taken honors geometry if you knew you could sign up yourself without a teacher's recommendation?

Student: Yes

Guidance counselor and Teacher Advice

Approximately 50% of the students interviewed reported that their guidance counselor and/or teacher had discussed or advised them about enrolling in classes. Most of the counselors who did provide advice indicated that the classes would be challenging and a lot of hard work. Unfavorable comments by guidance counselors can negatively impact course selection and enrollment, as evidenced by the following student's comments:

Researcher: Are you enrolled in the Institute of Math and Science (IMS)?

Student: No. What happened was, I was enrolled in IMS but they told me that people

have breakdowns because of it.

Researcher: Who told you that?

Student: My guidance counselor

Researcher: So you are in the 10th grade, right?

Student: So now I am in the Institute of Humanities, which focuses more on English and History.

Researcher: So when you entered high school, in the 9th grade, were you enrolled in IMS?

Student: No, I took the test

Researcher: There's a test you have to take?

Student: No, not a test. But I had to submit like a paragraph as to why I want to be in the Program and I was going through emotional things. Like my parents recently got divorced. So I decided not to take that road (IMS), it was going to be too stressful because I heard from everyone that its just a bunch of stress. So I just went to the Institute of Humanities.

Parental Influence

These student interviews revealed that their parents had a significant influence on their decision to enroll in honors. Seven of the eight students enrolled in honors indicated that their parent(s) discussed the importance of enrolling in honors classes. The following student's comments indicate that even if parents did not fully understand the role of

honors classes, they encouraged their children to enroll in them because honors classes provided the best educational opportunity.

Researcher: Did your parents enroll in any honors classes that your teacher did not recommend you?

Student : Yes. My Mom asked my teacher to put me in honors English but the teacher didn't. So she asked my guidance counselor. The teacher then realized I should be put in the honors class

Researcher: How do you think your parents influenced your decision to enroll or not enroll in honors classes?

Student: Heavily, I mean they stressed it like about being successful, like everything is for your college and your career later on. Between now and college you should be getting A's.

Researcher: So your parents were familiar with honors classes?

Student: It think it was more the idea of it, like oh honors is the best so that's what you need to be in.

The students reported that their parents made statements such as “ You are very, very smart and should be in honors” and “Honors classes are the best so you need to be in it”. One student indicated that she was concerned about getting a ‘C’ in Honors Biology. Her mom told her if she got an ‘A’ for the first marking period in non-honors Biology then she would switch to Honors Biology the next marking period. She did receive an ‘A’ and switched to Honors Biology where she reported continuing to get A's. During the interviews it became evident that the self-enrollment process was utilized because three of the students who were enrolled in honors, indicated their parents contacted the school and requested that their child be placed in honors.

Parent's educational background also played a role in the enrollment decision, as reported by several students. Students showed an interest in the subjects that were related to their parents' occupations. For instance, a student whose parent is a music teacher enrolled in the Institute of Humanities, and the daughter of a physician enrolled in the Institute of Math & Science. The following is an example of a student who enrolled in the Institute of Math & Science and the Institute of Citizen Empowerment. This was the first and only student who indicated that they had enrolled in more than one institute.

Researcher: How and why did you decide to enroll in an Institute?

Student: I chose to enroll in IMS because it was my Mom's choice.

Researcher: It was your Mom's choice?

Student: Yes. She wanted me to do something in the sciences for college, that's basically it and I have more interest in Institute of Citizen Empowerment (ICE) because both of my parents are lawyers and I'm kind of interested in that so that's why I enrolled in ICE, for myself; and in IMS to make my Mom happy".

The family discussion about the enrollment in honors classes was reported as involving not only parents but grandparents, also were noted as actively participating in the discussion. Older siblings were also noted as having a positive influence on the decision to enroll in honors and advanced classes.

One of the two students, who were not enrolled in honors classes, indicated that her parents want her to be enrolled in honors classes. This student stated, " My guidance counselor did not talk to me about enrolling in honors classes but my parents want me to be in honors classes. I know I should be in all honors classes but I procrastinate a lot. I worry about all the wrong things basically and I know that I am". (This student's parents both have high school diplomas, rent their home, have lived in the district 1-3years, have

no history of high ability grouping, and the mother born in US, while the father born in Jamaica)

Teacher Expectations

When questioned about their opinions of teacher's expectations for students, the majority of students interviewed indicated that they believed that teachers have the same expectations for all students. However, two students indicated that teachers treated students differently based on performance.

Example 1: "If kids get a couple of C's teachers stop expecting they'll do good"

Example 2: "If you get an 'A', they [teachers] challenge them more to make them better than if they are like 'D' or 'C' students. They treat them differently than the 'A' person. They will give them easier work just to make them pass, won't challenge them or recommend them for higher classes"

Achievement Linked to Race

It is interesting to note that although all of the students indicated that teachers had the same expectations for all students "regardless of race", some Black students seem to link academic achievement to race. One student reported that her Asian friend informed her that other students are surprised when they find out she is not enrolled in honors. Another student indicated that "Students feel like people who are Asians should do better than African Americans (Blacks)". These comments are reflective of the association between Asian students and academic achievement known as "model minority status. Dr. Lew notes that "Asian American status as model minorities – a stereotype that often conflates

with whiteness- plays an important ideological role in perpetuating ideals of individual meritocracy, especially for poor minority students” (Lew, 2006). A potential contributing factor as why Blacks perceive Asians as more intelligent than Blacks is because of the in-school segregation that is played out everyday within the school structure. The students can easily observe that Asian students primarily take classes in institutes, which is the known the highest academic level in the school.

Reasons for Success & Failure in Honors

A few of the students indicated that students’ fail in honors because of factors related to the system such as “too much pressure” or “pace too fast”. However the majority of these students felt that individual factors were the cause of failure. Study participants commonly indicated the following reasons for success, reasons for failure and advice they (students) would provide about honors (see Table 3).

Table 3: Student perceptions of honors

Success in honors	Failure in honors	Advice about honors
Students like to challenge themselves	Student’s can’t handle the challenge	Take honors classes because you will learn more than in regular classes
Students only enroll in subjects that they do well in	Student’s take too many honors classes	Enroll in your best subjects
Students strive for excellence and work hard	Student’s don’t study/not willing to work hard	Work hard/keep up with the work

The primary reason stated for enrolling in honors classes were “to get into college”, “to be able to take AP classes” and because they like challenges.

Self-reported Intelligence

These students overwhelmingly indicated that they believed that they were “very smart” and of above average in intelligence. Many said that this belief was instilled in them by

(or somewhat) related to their parents. Below is an example of how one parent influenced their child's perception of their intellectual ability:

Researcher: How would you describe your intellectual ability?

Student: Well, I was raised by my parents who told me every day that you're the best, you're the brightest, so I guess it's just built into my brain. I know that I'm smart, I'm intelligent and I can do anything I want to do. To me, I believe that I'm the brightest and if I put in enough work I can do whatever I like.

Differential Treatment related to Race

Several students responded that they had not experienced different or unfair treat because of their race. One student who has lived in the district for more than ten years indicated that in elementary school a teacher tried to "dumb them down" and failed them (them, being himself, the Black male and another Hispanic male). Below are the comments of a student who relayed a story of the only four Black female students in IMS all being called by the same name by various teachers. She felt this was very disrespectful because the students do not look alike.

Researcher: Have you ever been treated differently or unfairly in school because of your race and if you have, can you describe the experience?

Student: Yes. Actually between me and my friends, there are about four African females who are enrolled in IMS (Institute of Math & Science). We were seen by the teachers as all the same person. My friend, Andy*, who's African American and my friend, Angela* were all in IMS. All were called Angela. Like last year I took geometry with a teacher and she called me Angela the whole entire year and with all the reminding, my French teacher has done this too and so (has) my chemistry teacher.

Researcher: Do you guys look anything at all alike?

Student: No we don't. They're not as tall as me. We all look different, we don't look alike at all.

(* - names changed to protect confidentiality)

Student Treatment of Honor Students

None of the students reported that they were treated badly by other students because of their enrollment in honors or advanced classes. In fact, the students enrolled in honors stated that non-honor students often ask them for help. One student felt this was an indication of being treated differently. He stated "There are well, sometimes people ask, did you do this essay or did you do your homework and I'm like oh, I don't have that teacher. I'm in this (honors) class. They're like oh, you're in honors class? Could you help me with this cause you're in honors classes?"

Researcher: Is there anything else you want to tell me about honors classes? Or about how students feel about you taking honors classes? Do they treat you differently?

Student: No. But some of the kids brags. I guess, they feel like they're smarter. Someone said to me, well why don't you do that? I know I shouldn't want to make people feel more inferior because I'm in honors

Researcher: Are there positive comments about kids in honors or are there more negative comments?

Student: It's really fun being in honors classes because you're more with people on your level than other people.

Researcher: So are your friends primarily in honors classes?

Student: Yeah

Researcher: Do the other kids make fun of the kids in honors?

Student: No

Researcher: Anything else you want to tell me about honors?

Student: No

Institute versus Honors

In September of 2009, a new aspect of ability grouping (racialized tracking) was created at West Orange High School through the implementation of institutes. Six of the eight student participants enrolled in honors were also enrolled in institutes. All of the students enrolled in the institutes indicated that the work was more difficult and the pace was much faster than in the honors classes. These students reported that the differences between honors classes and institute class were frequently discussed. They indicated that institutes stress the utilization of critical thinking skills. Several students noted that teacher's expectations were higher in the institutes. For example, a student reported that a teacher told her on the first day of IMS Algebra II, "This is Algebra I stuff, and you should know this. You are lacking essential skills". This student noted that the teacher's comment made her feel that she would not do not well and should not be in the institute.

Researcher: Do students feel that there is a distinction between honors, institutes and general college prep?

Student: Yes

Researcher: How?

Student: Um like what I've been told, plain honors algebra II is way different from honor algebra II in IMS. My friends are in material in honor algebra II that I did back in September

Researcher: So the pace is faster

Student: The pace is much faster and the workload is more

Researcher: Do students talk about the distinction between honors and institutes?

Student: Yes, all the time

Student: There's a huge gap between honors and honors IMS. I feel like IMS, you come in class and they expect you to know more than a normal Algebra II student. Because my student on the first day when I came in said this Algebra I stuff, you should know this and I've never been told that before

Researcher: So how did you feel when she said you know that already?

Student: When I started school I had some trouble and she told me I was lacking skills essentials?

Researcher: Were you able to catch up?

Student: I stayed after school and my grades got higher and she told me I was alright.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your honors or institute classes?

Student: Well, in the Institute of Humanities, we do a lot of field trips for career paths like recently we to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They told us that on all of our trips we'll be doing an assignment that has to go with it. Like when we went to the museum we had to find a painting or a sculpture and we had to show the author conveyed the theme for whatever we chose. We were learning about absolute power absolutism, and the French Revolution. We had to talk about how we would talk to someone entering and speaking....

Under-representation of Blacks in Institutes

The researcher was informed that the West Orange School District could not provide information identifying the racial composition of the students in the small learning communities because they do not maintain that information. During the interviews however the students informed the researcher of the under-representation of Blacks and over-representation of Whites in Institutes.

Researcher: During your IMS honor classes what's the racial balance in those classes?

Student: Like ethnicity?

Researcher: Yes

Student: I'm like the only Black male in all of my classes

Researcher: In your classes, your honor classes, those that are in the Institute of Humanities, world history and English, what's the diversity like in these classes? The racial makeup?

Student: Well I would say quite a bit of diversity, but there's not as many African American, but there's like Caucasian, Asian and Hispanic? Like I didn't really think about it but in my classes there's not a lot of African Americans.

Textbooks versus Workbooks

Another difference that the students reported during the interviews was that the (non-institute) honors classes frequently used worksheets instead of textbooks. Prior to the implementation of institutes, honors classes at West Orange High School predominantly used textbooks and non-honors classes used worksheets. During these

interviews, the interviewer learned that the honors classes were being taught primarily from worksheets. Institute classes however, were reported as using primarily using textbooks for class instruction. Below are some interview responses of student's who were enrolled in general honors classes:

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to share about being in honors classes?

Student: Well, one thing I really noticed, the classes won't be that hard but a lot of the time the teacher affects how you do. A lot of students don't realize that as much they should a lot of time. They will just simply don't understand the materials. Like my science teacher says just ask questions, which I think is crazy. Like my math teacher she says you don't need to take notes in class, I just get so confused.

Researcher: You don't take notes in class?

Student: No. She just gives us a packet of work and we just do packets of schoolwork and go over the answers in class.

Researcher: Do you have a math book?

Student: No, I don't have a math book.

It is common knowledge that colleges and universities commonly require students to obtain and utilize textbooks. This is a vastly different learning process than the limited process of completing exercises on worksheets. As an educator and/or parent, one could question if classes that do not use textbooks can adequately prepare students for college. The information from these interviews led to the inclusion, of a query about teaching materials used in classes (i.e., textbooks and worksheets) on this researcher's on-line survey instrument.

In-school Segregation

Prior to the implementation of institutes at West Orange High School in 2009, although Black students were in the majority of students, most of the students enrolled in honors classes were White. There was a significant underrepresentation of Blacks in honors classes. However, since institutes have been implemented there has been a significant increase in the diversity of students enrolled in honors classes. The students interviewed indicated that honors classes are very racially diverse. However, they reported that there was only one Black male student and only four (4) Black females enrolled in the Institute of Math & Science. This suggests that in-school segregation that formerly existed prior to September 2009 in West Orange High School honors classes are currently integrated into the school's institutes.

In-school segregation is also noted in Horizons, where the population is 95% Black students. One student who was interviewed indicated that she was enrolled in Horizons. She stated that she only learned of her enrollment in Horizons, during the first day of school. By her definition this was the learning community that incorporated students with behavioral problems.

Data Limitations

A review of the data from these interviews revealed that the majority of the participants were enrolled in honors classes and/or an institute. I suggest that this overrepresentation of students in honors and institute versus the general school population (non-honors) occurred because the English teachers selected the students who would be given the opportunity to participate in the study. Although teachers were instructed to invite any Black student to participate, they primarily invited honors students, and since the majority of Black students who are enrolled in honors are female, this group of study participants was primarily Black female students who were enrolled in honors classes.

The implications of generational status were also limited because the data revealed that the study participants were predominantly (80%) first generation Americans and 75% of these first generation Americans were enrolled in honors and/or institutes. Since the study population was small and the school district does not maintain data pertaining to generational status, the researcher is prohibited from making any inferences based on this data alone. It is interesting to note that the only two Black students interviewed both lacked a history of their parental immigration to America (John Ogbu called these students “voluntary minorities”), had no history of high ability grouping and had parents with only had 2 years or less of college, and yet both of these students were enrolled in an institute. The enrollment of these students was not related to some of the primary factors investigated in this study. This data suggests that parent educational background, generational status and ability grouping may not be primary factors that influence student enrollment in honors and/or advance classes.

In spite of the aforementioned study limitations, the researcher did benefit and derive important information from all of the study participants. Study participants who were enrolled in honors classes and/or institutes were able to shed light on factors that influenced their decision to enroll in honors and provide personal testimonies about their experiences with ability grouping and advanced classes. Students who were not enrolled in honors or institute classes were able to provide valuable insight into factors that influenced their decision not to enroll in these classes as well as share their perceptions of these classes from an “outsiders” perspective.

Chapter 6: Survey Demographics (Component #2)

The demographic data of the study population who participated in an online survey (Component #2) implemented through the use of Survey Monkey is presented below. All of the 9th and 10th grade students (regardless of race) at West Orange High School were invited to participate in this online survey. A total of 128 surveys were completed. The researcher compiled responses from students who reported their race as Black. The responses from the White students were not included in the data analysis because this research study was designed to analyze the perceptions and experiences of Black students, not White students. White students were invited to participate in the study because I did not want to bias the students' responses by indicating that race was a major variable being studied. The total study population used in the analysis was ninety-five Black students (N=95).

Grade & Gender

Table 4 displays the frequency of students by grade level and gender. The distribution shows that the study participants consisted of a slightly larger number of 9th grade students than 10th grade students. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents were 9th graders. The distribution also shows that the study population was predominately female. Seventy-five percent of the survey respondents were female. There were only two tenth grade Black males that responded to the survey, which is very low in comparison to the twenty ninth grade Black males who responded. The researcher is uncertain why this discrepancy occurred since the students were given equal opportunity and access to the survey.

TABLE 4: Students by grade and gender (N=88)

GRADE	FEMALE		MALE		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
10th	35	39.7	2	2.2	37	42.1
9 th	31	35.2	20	22.7	51	57.9
Total	66	74.9	22	25.0	88	100

Socioeconomic Status

The variables used to measure socioeconomic status were homeownership, household structure, free or reduced lunch, and parent's education. Table 5 displays the frequency of students by highest level of parent education. This table reveals that the majority of parents are college educated. Approximately 60% possessed a bachelor's degree or higher. Forty-two percent of the parents had masters and/or professional degrees. Less than 7% were high school educated only.

TABLE 5: Highest Parent Education (N= 80)

Highest Parent Education	N	%
High School	5	6.2
Masters	22	27.5
Professional	12	15.0
Bachelor	14	17.5
Some College	19	23.8
Two-year College	8	10.0

More than half of the students who responded to this question indicated that their parent (s) owned their home. Thirty –four percent indicated that they rent their home (see Table 6).

TABLE 6: Home Ownership (N=94)

Home Ownership	N	%
Don't know	13	13.8
Own your home	49	52.1
Rent your home	32	34.0

The students in the study were predominantly being raised in two-parent households. Table 7, Parents in Home, showcases the findings addressing household structure. The results indicate that almost 60% of students have both parents in the home, and single moms are raising thirty percent.

TABLE 7: Household Structure (N = 94)

Parents in home	N	%
Both	55	58.5
Father	7	7.4
Guardian	3	3.2
Mother	29	30.8

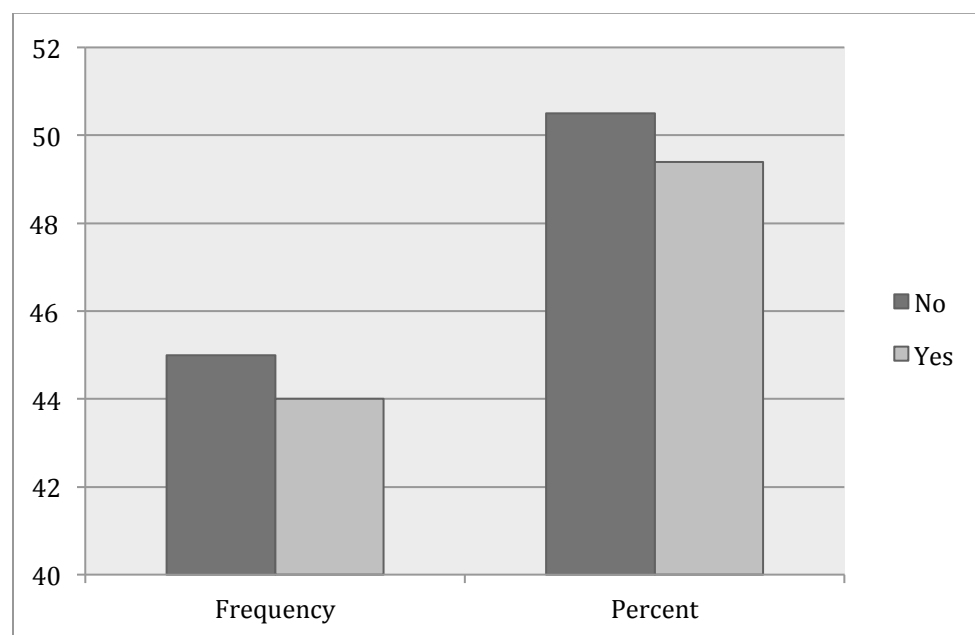
Table 8 indicates that slightly less than half (49%) of the study population received free or reduced lunch. Proportionally, there were a greater percentage of non-honors students (57 %) receiving free or reduced lunch than honors students (45%). There was, however, an even distribution of honors and non-honors students within the total number of students

receiving free or reduced lunch (50% were non-honors students and 50% were honors students).

This is a surprising result because the majority of study participants were from educated (60% possessed Bachelor degrees or higher), two parent families (58% with both parents in home) with slightly more than half (52%) owning their homes. So it appears contradictory that a portion of these families would be eligible for free or reduced. This may reflect the fact

that college-educated Blacks earn less than Whites (Dan Black, 2006).

TABLE 8: Students receiving free or reduced lunch



Ethnicity:

Table 9 shows that although all of the study participants reported their race as Black, the majority (69%) indicated they were Caribbean, West Indian or African versus African American. There were 18 participants (19%) who identified themselves as African American and 11 participants (12%) who identified

themselves as Black and Hispanic/ Latino. The West Orange school district does not maintain information pertaining to ethnicity. Therefore, although the majority of students in the study were of Caribbean descent, a comparison of the study sample to the general population or total Black population could not be conducted.

TABLE 9: Race and ethnicity N= 95

Race-Ethnicity	N	%
Black - African American (not Hispanic)	18	18.9
Black - Caribbean, West Indian or African	66	69.5
Black - Hispanic/Latino	11	11.6

Length of Time in District:

Table 10 displays the frequency of students by years living in district. This table shows that over 65% of the study population has lived in the district for six or more years with 29% of these students being categorized as “lifers” because their entire schooling has occurred in district. This result indicates that the majority of study population did not recently move into the district and that they primarily received their schooling (education) in the district.

TABLE 10: Years the family has lived in the district

	N	%
1-3 years	12	13.0
4-5 years	12	13.0
6-10 years	34	36.9
Less than 1 year	7	7.6
More than 10 years	27	29.3

Examining class enrollment

This section provides information highlighting the differences and similarities in study variables that were used to analyze potential factors that may influence Black students' decisions to enroll or not enroll in honors and advance classes in this racially diverse suburban high school.

Honors –versus- Non-honors

Fifty-eight percent of the study population who responded to the question of which classes they were enrolled in (N=83) who reported being enrolled in honors classes (see Table 11). Fifty percent of the students enrolled in honors classes were 9th graders and the remaining fifty percent were 10th graders. There was no statistical difference in grade levels of students enrolled in honors.

TABLE 11: Comparison of enrollment in honors classes by grade

HONORS	GRADE					
	9 th	9 th	10 th	10 th	Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	25	30.1	10	12.05	35	42.2
YES	24	28.9	24	28.9	38	57.8
TOTAL	49	59.0	34	40.9	83	100.0

N=83 P-value = 0.706

Gender

Participants in this research study were overwhelmingly (75%) female. Research findings revealed that being female was associated with enrollment in honors classes. The majority (79%) of study participants who were enrolled in honors were female. There were twenty-two males who responded to the query pertaining to gender and 45% of these male respondents were enrolled in honors classes (see Table 12). This is consistent

with literature that indicates that Black females attain greater academic success than Black males (Allen, 1985).

TABLE 12: Comparison of enrollment in honors classes by gender

HONORS	GENDER					
	FEMALE		MALE		TOTAL	TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	24	28.6	12	14.3	36	42.9
YES	38	45.2	10	11.9	48	57.1
TOTAL	62	73.8	22	26.2	84	100.0

N=84

P-value=0.2191

Table 13 displays the number of honors classes taken by the study population. Half of the respondents (50%) were not enrolled in any honors classes. Seventeen percent (17%) were enrolled in one or two honors classes and 33% of study participants were enrolled in three or more honors classes.

TABLE 13: Number of honors classes N=95

# Honors classes	N	%
0	48	50.5
1	7	7.4
2	9	9.5
3	7	7.4
4	5	5.3
5	19	20.0

Table 14 displays data pertaining to "Who influenced the students enrolled in honors classes to select honors classes". Parents were identified as the major source (69%) of

influence in the enrollment of honors. Teachers are reported as having the second greatest influence on enrollment. Fifty percent (50%) of these students indicated that their high school guidance counselors influenced them in their decision to enroll in honors classes. Only 37% of students indicated that their teachers or 8th grade guidance counselor influenced them in their respective enrollment in honors classes.

TABLE 14: Persons who influenced students' decision to enroll in honor

Ethnicity and Generational Status

Table 15 shows that the majority of the study population, eighty three percent (83%), who reported being enrolled in honors classes were born in the United States. Table 15 "Enrollment in honors classes by ethnicity" shows that only 22% of students enrolled in honors identify themselves as African American. These students did not identify themselves as African Americans because although they were born in the United States (US), they are first generation Americans based on their parents' birthplace being outside the US (see Tables 17 & 18). Statistical analysis also revealed there was no significant statistical difference in the enrollment in honors for the various ethnicities.

TABLE 15: Birthplace of students enrolled in honors and non-honors classes

HONORS	BIRTHPLACE					
	U.S.	U.S.	NON-US	NON-US	TOTAL	TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	30	30.5	9	10.2	39	4.3
YES	41	46.6	8	9.1	49	55.7
TOTAL	71	80.7	17	19.3	88	100.0

N=71 P-value = 0.5877

TABLE 16: Enrollment in honors classes by ethnicity

HONOR	Ethnicity							
	African American	African American	Caribbean, West Indian African	Caribbean West Indian African	Hispanic	Hispanic	Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	6	6.8	28	31.8	5	5.7	39	44.3
YES	11	12.5	32	36.4	6	6.8	49	55.7
TOTAL	17	19.3	60	68.2	11	12.5	88	100.0

N=88

P-value= 0.8912

The results show that more than seventy percent of the parents' whose children were enrolled in honors classes were not born in the U.S., and therefore the majority of the students enrolled in honors were first generation Americans (see Tables 17 and 18).

TABLE 17: Maternal birthplace of students enrolled in honors and non-honors

N=86

P-value = 0.806

HONORS	MATERNAL BIRTHPLACE					
	U.S.	U.S.	NON-US	NON-US	TOTAL	TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	9	10.5	28	32.6	37	43.1
YES	14	16.3	35	40.7	49	56.9
TOTAL	23	26.7	63	73.3	86	100.0

TABLE 18: Paternal birthplace of students enrolled in honors and non-honors

HONORS	PATERNAL BIRTHPLACE					
	U.S.	U.S.	NON-US	NON-US	TOTAL	TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	11	12.8	26	30.3	37	43.1
YES	13	15.1	36	41.8	49	56.9
TOTAL	24	27.9	62	72.1	86	100.0

N=86

P-value = 0.8104

Tables 17 and 18 reveal that the majority of students enrolled in honors are first generation Americans. Statistical analysis revealed that there was no statistical significance in enrollment in honors classes relative to generational status.

Socioeconomic Factors

The following socioeconomic factors (home ownership, free & reduced lunch & parent education) were explored in order to investigate their potential relationship to enrollment in honors and advanced classes. Analysis of the data showed no significant difference in the enrollment of honors classes between students who were eligible to receive free and reduced lunches and those who were not eligible.

There was a significant difference noted in the enrollment in honors classes for students whose parents owned their home versus parents who rented their homes. Sixty percent of the students enrolled in honors classes lived in homes that were owned, not rented (see Table 19).

TABLE 19: Homeownership of honor and non-honors students

Honors	Home ownership						Total	
	Don't know	Don't know	Own Home	Own Home	Rent Home	Rent Home		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	9	10.3	14	16.1	16	18.4	39	44.8
YES	4	4.6	29	33.3	15	17.2	48	55.2
TOTAL	13	14.9	43	49.4	31	35.6	87	100.0

N=87

P-value= 0.0436

The data suggests that parental educational background influenced their children's course selections. The following table (Table 20) shows that sixty-one percent (61%) of students whose parents had a bachelors degree or higher were in enrolled in honors classes. Seventy-two percent of students whose parents had a masters' degree or higher were enrolled in honors classes. Forty-six percent of the students whose parents had some college were enrolled in honors classes. However, none of the students whose parents had only a high school education were enrolled in honors or advanced classes. The data reflect that the higher the educational background of parents, the more likely students will be enrolled in honor classes. Conversely, students whose parents had less education were incrementally noted as being less likely to be enrolled in honors classes.

TABLE 20: Parent education and enrollment in honors

Parent Education	N	%
High School	5	0
Some College	26	46.2
Bachelors	13	61.5
Masters/Professional Degree	33	72.7
Total	77	100.0

N = 77 P-value = 0.0020

The table below (Table 21 – Years lived in district by enrollment in honors) shows that the majority of the study population was primarily educated in the West Orange school district. Sixty-seven percent of the study population reported living in the district for six or more years. In addition, 80% of the study population who were enrolled in honors classes had lived in the district for six or more years. Table 21 also contains data that indicates that students living in the district for 6 or more years were four times more likely to be enrolled in honors than students living in the district for 5 years or less.

TABLE 21: Years lived in district by enrollment in honors

Honors	Years in District				Total	
	5 years or less	5 years or less	6 years or more	6 years or more	Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	19	22.1	19	22.1	38	44.2
YES	9	10.5	39	35.3	48	55.8
TOTAL	28	32.6	58	67.4	86	100.0

N=86 P-value = 0.0427

TABLE 22: Students enrollment in honors and/or an institute

Honors	Institute					
	NO	NO	YES	YES	TOTAL	TOTAL
		%	N	%	N	%
NO	35	41.2	2	2.4	37	43.5
YES	31	36.5	17	20.0	48	56.5
TOTAL	66	77.6	19	22.4	85	100.0

N= 85

P-value= 0.001

Institutes have separate (institute) honors classes and they also have classes not identified as institute honors classes. A student must be enrolled in an institute in order to an institute honors or institute non-honors class. The data shows (see Table 22) 90% of students enrolled in institutes were also enrolled in honors. Ten percent of students enrolled in institutes were not in enrolled honors, but they are however, enrolled in institute classes, not general track classes.

Chapter 7: Black suburban student perceptions of honors classes

This chapter presents student's responses to the qualitative research questions that were included in the on line survey instrument. This survey instrument allowed the researcher to obtain first-hand information from Black students about their academic experiences and perceptions that could influence their course selection decisions.

Research Question: Are students' perceptions of honors classes associated with their academic self-concept?

Students were asked about questions about their perceptions of honors classes such as Are colleges influenced by students who enroll in honors classes? What advice would you give students about enrolling in honors classes? The majority of students reported positive perceptions of honors classes regardless of whether or not they were enrolled in honor and/or advance classes. One of the indicators that measured student perceptions of honors classes was whether or not students believed that colleges would be influenced by a students' enrollment in honors classes. The responses to this query were analyzed in relationship to the respondents' academic self-concept scores. Students mean academic self-concept scores were not significantly different when compared to their perceptions of the role that honors classes could potentially play in the college admission process. There was no significant difference between the academic self-concept scores of students who believed or did not believe that colleges would be influenced by the fact that a student had taken honors classes (see Table 23).

Table 23: Student academic self-concept score and perception of whether colleges are influenced by enrollment in honors

College Influenced	N	ASCS Mean	Std. Dev.
No	8	2.68	0.30
Yes	66	2.75	0.28

T = -0.60

P-value = 0.5501

Regardless of their academic self-concept scores, these study participants overwhelmingly indicated that they would encourage other students to enroll in honors and advance classes (see Table 24). Students who interviewed stated that they would caution other students only to enroll in subject that they would work hard to keep up and do well in. This sentiment was both voiced by students during interviews and reflected in online survey responses. They clearly indicated that students take honors only in their best subjects. In summary, the data indicated that, regardless of the students' academic self-concept scores, they had overwhelmingly positive perceptions of honors classes and that they would encourage students to enroll in honors classes. There was no evidence of significant difference in students' perceptions of honors classes when compared to their academic self-concepts. The students primarily had positive perceptions of honors classes and there was no significant difference in the academic self-concept of the students who had positive or negative perceptions of honors.

Table 24: Student academic self-concept score and advice they would give other students about honors classes N=80

Honors Advice	N	ASCS Mean	Std. Dev.
Negative	10	2.63	0.26
Positive	70	2.74	0.29

T = -1.12

P-value = 0.2675

Research Question: Are students' perceptions of honors courses associated with their enrollment in honors classes?

When questioned about the advice they would provide about honor classes, as well as reasons why students succeed in honors and whether colleges are influenced by enrollment in honors classes, responses from the survey respondents were essentially the same. Sixty-eight percent of study participants indicated that students do well in honor classes because they work hard (see Table 25). These research findings suggest that students' perceptions of honors classes could influence their enrollment in honors classes. Since the majority survey respondents expressed concern about doing well, it could be inferred that if a student perceived that honors classes were too difficult to do well in, they would refrain from enrolling in honors classes. The majority (88%) of study participants however had positive advice about enrollment in honors classes (see Table 26). Ninety-two of the students who were enrolled in honors had positive advice and comments about honors and 82% of the students who were not enrolled in honors had positive advice and comments about honors (see Table 27). In addition, 87% of the study

population indicated that colleges would be influenced by enrollment in honors classes (see Table 26).

TABLE 25: Student perceptions of reasons why students succeed in honors classes

Honors	Work hard	Work hard	Prepared & Smart	Prepared & Smart	Moti- vated	Moti- vated	Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	13	27.1	5	10.3	2	4.2	20	41.6
YES	20	41.6	4	8.3	4	8.3	28	58.4
TOTAL	33	68.7	9	18.7	5	12.5	48	100.0

N=48 P-value =0.2884

TABLE 26: Student perceptions of whether colleges are influenced by honors classes

HONORS	NO	NO	YES	YES	TOTAL	TOTAL
		%	N	%	N	%
NO	4	5.0	31	38.7	35	43.7
YES	6	7.5	39	48.7	45	56.2
TOTAL	10	12.5	70	87.5	80	100.0

N=80 P-value = 1.0000

TABLE 27: Advice given by honors and non-honors students about honors classes

HONORS	Negative		Positive		Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	35	41.2	2	2.4	37	43.5
YES	31	36.5	17	20.0	48	56.5
TOTAL	66	77.6	19	22.4	85	100.0

N=85 P-value = 0.2045

In summary, these responses indicate that regardless of whether respondents were honor students or not, most had positive advice about honors classes and they also understood that colleges would be positively influenced by a student's enrollment in honors classes.

TABLE 28: Reasons why students fail honors classes

Honors	N	% Blamed individual factors	% Blamed system factors
No	33	54.5	45.5
Yes	45	80.0	20.0
Total	78		

N=78

P-value =0.0027

However students did report differences in perception of why students fail in honor classes. Table 28 shows that students who are not enrolled in honors classes are more than twice as likely to blame system level or school factors for failure in honors classes. Students in honors classes are more likely to blame individual factors for failure in honors classes. It is interesting to note that students' responses to the query about why they thought students fail honors classes showed that the majority (80%) of the honors

students believed this failure was due to individual-level factors such as not working hard enough. It is interesting to note that the majority (54%) of students who were not enrolled in honors also indicated that individual factors were responsible for failure in honors. However a significant percentage of the non-honors student reported that system factors (such as too much work) were the predominant cause of failure (45%).

In summary, the data indicate that the overwhelming majority reported positive perceptions of honors classes and understood the role that honor classes play in academic achievement. However, when taking into consideration students' perceptions of why students fail honor classes, the analysis suggests that negative perceptions regarding too much work and an overly fast pace may influence decisions to refrain from enrolling in honors classes. These findings are also consistent with students' beliefs that students should enroll in classes that they believe they will do well in. Consequently, the analysis suggests that students' perception of honors classes may in fact influence their enrollment in honors classes.

Research Question: Are students' perceptions of honors courses associated with their experiences with ability grouping?

Students, who experienced high ability grouping and the students who were not tracked, had essentially the same perception of why students succeed. A total of 68% of these students, 33% and 35% respectively reported that students succeed in honors because they work hard (see Table 29).

TABLE 29: Perceptions of why students succeed in honors by students who experienced high ability grouping (tracked) and non-tracked students

High Tracking	Work hard N	Work hard %	Prepared & Smart N	Prepared & Smart %	Motivated N	Motivated %	Total N	Total %
NO	17	35.4	7	14.5	4	8.3	28	58.3
YES	16	33.3	2	4.1	2	4.1	20	41.6
TOTAL	33	68.7	9	18.7	6	12.5	48	100.0

N= 48 P-value = 0.7144

Students who have been in placed high ability groups have a history of succeeding in challenging courses and therefore they may be less intimidated by the amount of work or rigor expected in the course. They are also more likely to have a better understanding of the importance colleges attribute to enrollment in honors classes (see Table 30). Eighty-eight percent of the study participants indicated that colleges are influenced by enrollment in honors classes.

TABLE 30: Perceptions of whether colleges are influenced by students who were Placed in high ability groups (High Tracking)

High Tracking	Colleges		Influenced		TOTAL	TOTAL
	NO	NO	YES	YES	TOTAL	TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	7	8.3	43	51.1	50	59.5
YES	3	3.5	31	36.9	34	40.4
TOTAL	10	11.9	74	88.1	84	100.0

N= 84 P-value = 0.7333

TABLE 31: Perceptions of why students fail honors by students who were tracked

High Tracking	Individual Factors	Individual Factors	System Factors	System Factors	Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	34	41.5	17	20.7	51	62.2
YES	23	28.1	8	9.8	31	37.8
TOTAL	57	69.5	25	30.5	82	100.0
N=82 P-value = 0.2268						

As previously noted, the majority of study participants had positive perceptions of honors classes, which was reflected in data that showed 87% had positive advice (ie, indicated honors classes were important and would recommend that students enroll in honors) to offer about enrolling in honors classes. None of the study participants with high ability grouping experience indicated that the teacher's expectations were too high or that the pace was too fast. However, 41% of those students who did not experience high ability grouping (see Table 31) indicated that individual factors (i.e., lack of effort, students don't work hard) were the cause of student failure in honors classes. In addition, students who were enrolled in honors or had experienced high ability grouping were more likely to indicate that colleges consider student enrollment in honors and advanced classes. This data suggests that positive experiences with ability-grouping influences a students' perception of honor classes being important.

Chapter 8: Quantitative Survey Data

This chapter will investigate how academic self-concept, ability grouping and other factors will play in influencing Black suburban student enrollment in honors and advanced classes. Academic self-concept is defined as the individual's self-concept regarding their academic ability (or their internal reference) as well as the individual's assessment of how others in the school setting perceive his or her academic behavior (or external reference) (Strein, 1993a). The researcher wanted to gain an understanding of whether student academic self-concept influenced decisions to enroll or refrain from enrolling in honors and advanced classes. The following section summarizes study findings after noting the research questions that guided the research.

Research Question: Are students' academic self-concepts associated with their enrollment in honors classes?

An analysis of the academic self-concept scores showed students who were enrolled in honors had significantly higher academic self-concepts scores than students who were not enrolled in honor classes.

TABLE 32: Student ASCS by enrollment in honors

HONORS	N	MEAN	STD DEV
NO	31	2.65	0.35
YES	45	2.79	.25

T= -2.05

P-value = 0.0444

Students who were not enrolled in any honors classes had the lowest academic self-concept scores. Statistical analysis (see Table 32) showed academic self-concept is associated with enrollment in honors and advanced classes. In addition, Table 33 shows that the greater the number of honor classes in which students were enrolled, the higher

the corresponding academic self-concept score; and conversely, that students with fewer honors classes had lower academic self-concept scores.

TABLE 33: ASCS by number of honors classes students enrolled in

Total # of Honors Classes	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	6	2.67	0.24
2	9	2.78	0.15
3	6	2.79	0.27
4	4	2.80	0.19
5	18	2.89	0.25

T = -2.30 P-value = 0.538

This trend shows the students with the lowest academic scores were enrolled in the fewest

honors classes. Students who had highest academic self -concept scores were enrolled in more honors classes. In addition to measuring overall academic self-concept, questions that were related to self-confidence in academics (ASCS IV) and questions related to self-doubt about academic ability (ASCS VI) were compiled and examined in this study.

TABLE 34: Honors by Academic Self-Concept IV
(ASC IV – measures self-confidence in academic ability)

HONORS	N	MEAN	STD DEV
NO	33	2.59	0.62
YES	48	2.70	0.45

N = 84 T = -0.20 P-value = 0.8409

Students enrolled in honors classes scores reflected that they had slightly more self-confidence in their academic ability than students who were not enrolled in honors.

Tables 34 and 35 contain data indicate there was no significant difference in the self-confidence of students enrolled or not enrolled in honors.

TABLE 35: Honors by Academic Self-Concept VI
(ASC VI – measures self-doubt in academic ability)

HONORS	N	MEAN	STD DEV
NO	36	2.59	0.70
YES	48	2.61	0.44

T=0.99 P-value = 0.3252

Table 35 displays results for the ASCS VI, which includes items from Reynold's Academic Self-Concept Scale that measured students' self-doubt regarding their academic ability. The mean scores (ASCS VI) shows when self-doubt in academic abilities the students who were not enrolled in honors classes had lower academic self-concept scores. Students who were enrolled in honors classes had higher academic self-concept scores, which reflect less self-doubt regarding their academic abilities.

TABLE 36: High Ability Grouping by Academic Self-Concept IV
(ASC IV – measures self-confidence in academic ability)

High Ability Grouping	N	MEAN	STD DEV
NO	55	2.60	0.59
YES	34	2.61	0.08

T= -0.09 P-value =0.9257

Table 36 contains data pertaining to ASCS IV, which represents self-confidence in academics. There were no meaningful differences in the mean academic self-concept scores for students who had experienced high ability grouping versus students who had not been tracked. Students who had not experienced high ability grouping showed that

they had as much self-confidence in their academic ability as students who had not been placed in high ability grouping. There was, however, a significant difference in how different groups of students rated their intelligence in comparison to others. Table 38 shows that students who rated themselves as "Not as smart as others" had the lowest academic self-concept score (mean = 2.42) and students who rated themselves as "Smarter than average students" had the highest academic self-concept scores (mean = 2.79).

TABLE 37: Student rated intelligence in comparison to other students and ASCS

Intelligence in Comparison to Others	Academic Self Concept Score		
	N	Mean	STD DEV
Equal to other students	15	2.66	0.17
Equal to honor students	2	2.51	0.12
Not as smart as other	2	2.42	0.42
Smarter than average	26	2.78	0.26

P-value = 0.5542

Higher self-reported intellectual ability corresponded with a higher academic self-concept score. This data suggest that students' reporting of their intelligence was consistent and not over-reported or under-reported. This is also confirmation of the validity of the academic self-concept scores of that were obtained through Reynold's academic self-concept scale. The majority of students rated their intellectual ability as above average or higher. These results are similar to the interview responses with the students indicating that their parents were constantly telling them that they were very smart.

TABLE 38: Self-reported intellectual ability

Intellectual Ability	N	ASCS_total3	
		Mean	Std Dev
average	3	2.50	0.12
above average	19	2.68	0.26
smart	35	2.70	0.23
very smart	17	2.90	0.35

P-value = 0.0031

Research Question: Are students' enrollment in honors and or advanced classes associated with their experiences with ability grouping?

Table 39 indicates that 62% of the study population was not tracked (not selected by teachers or guidance counselors for HAP during elementary school and not tracked into High Math or High English during middle school). Approximately 37.8% of the total study population reported experiencing high ability grouping. However, 79% of the students enrolled in honors had experienced high ability grouping. Analysis of this data shows consistent evidence that student's enrollment in honors and advanced classes are associated with ability grouping.

TABLE 39: Students who were tracked (experienced high ability grouping in elementary school and/or middle school)

Tracking	N	%
No	59	62.1
Yes	36	37.8

N= 95

This analysis showed only 14% of the study population had been enrolled in the HAP program. Although only a small percentage of the study population had experienced high ability grouping that commenced in elementary school, the importance of the relationship to academic achievement is reflected in the fact that all but one of these students (92%) were enrolled in honors classes in high school (see Table 40).

TABLE 40: Students placed to the HAP program (elementary school)
*HAP - High Aptitude Placement

HONORS			HAP					
	Don't know	Don't know	NO	NO	YES	YES	Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	6	6.9	31	36.0	1	1.2	38	44.2
YES	3	3.5	34	39.5	11	12.8	48	55.8
TOTAL	9	10.5	65	75.6	12	13.9	86	100.0

N = 65 P-value =0.0133

Table 41 indicates that more than half (55%) of students enrolled in honors had been placed high level classes in middle school (placed in High Math or High Reading).

TABLE 41: Students placed in high level classes in middle school

HONORS			TRACKING			
	NO	NO	YES	YES	Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	32	32.6	7	7.9	39	44.3
YES	22	25.0	27	30.7	49	55.7
TOTAL	54	61.4	34	38.6	88	100.0

P-value = 0.0006686

Forty-five percent of students who had been placed in HAP (N=11) in elementary school were enrolled in an Institute (see Table 42). Twenty-seven per cent of the students enrolled in an Institute (highest level of ability grouping at the high school) (N=18) had

been placed in HAP. This data shows that the earlier the experience with high ability grouping the more likely the student will be enrolled in the highest level of ability grouping in high school.

TABLE 42: Students placed in HAP and enrolled in an institutes

Institute	HAP							
	Don't Know	Don't Know	NO	NO	YES	YES	Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
NO	9	10.3	54	62.1	6	6.9	69	79.3
YES	0	0.0	13	14.9	5	5.7	18	20.7
TOTAL	9	10.3	67	77.0	11	12.6	87	100.0

N = 87 P-value = .0476

These research findings indicate that students' enrollment in honors and or advanced classes is influenced by their experiences with ability grouping. The earlier in the academic experience (i.e. elementary school) that a student is placed in a higher-level track the more likely the student will be enrolled in honor or advanced classes in high school.

The model below (Figure 3) illustrates the logistic regression performed in SAS that shows that tracking (high ability grouping) is significantly associated with enrollment in honors classes. The odds of having had high ability grouping experience are 5.61 higher if you are enrolled in honors, Note: Confidence interval is wide because of the small sample size.

Figure 3: Model of High Ability Grouping Predicting Enrollment in Honors

Model	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	P-Value
High Ability Groupin 1=yes 0=no	5.61	2.08 – 15.14	.07

N=95

The model below (Figure 4) illustrates the logistic regression performed in SAS showing that high ability grouping is significantly associated with enrollment in an Institute. The odds of having had high ability grouping experience are 3.74 higher if you are enrolled in an Institute. Table 42: Students placed in HAP and enrolled in institutes indicates that 14% of the total study population had received High Aptitude Placement in elementary school; however 83% of the students enrolled in Institute had been tracked (enrolled in HAP) during elementary school.

Figure 4: Model of High Ability Grouping Predicting Enrollment in Institutes (N=89)

Model	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	P-Value
High Ability Grouping 1=yes 0=no	3.74	1.29 – 10.79	.01

Note: Confidence interval is wide because of the small sample.

Research Question: Are students' academic self-concepts associated with their experiences with ability grouping?

An analysis of the research data show students who experienced high ability grouping had significantly higher academic self-concepts (mean ASCS = 2.8) than students who were not placed in high ability groups (mean ASCS = 2.6). Table 44 shows that students

who experienced high ability grouping had higher academic self-concepts than students who did not have a history of high ability grouping. Students who were placed in high ability groups were more likely to receive an academic self-concept score (rating) of 3.0 or above which was defined by Dr. Reynolds as a high or strong academic self-concept.

TABLE 43: ASCS for students placed in high ability groups

High Ability Grouping	N	Mean	STD DEV
No	48	2.66	0.29
Yes	32	2.83	0.28

T= -2.70 P-value = 0.0084

The data clearly shows that students' academic self-concept scores are significant in relationship to their experiences with ability grouping. Students with high ability grouping had higher academic self-concept scores. Statistical tests revealed significant values related to ability group/tracking. There were significant findings related to students who were tracked and their academic self-concept scores as well as their enrollment in honors. Students who were tracked (experienced high ability grouping) were more likely to be enrolled in honors classes and had higher academic self-concept scores.

The model below (Figure 5) illustrates that the logistic regression performed in SAS reveals that academic self-concept is a predictor for honors. The odds of a high academic self-concept score are 2.9 higher if you are enrolled in honors. High ability grouping, however, is significantly more associated with enrollment in honors even when controlling for academic self-concept. Therefore, students who didn't have high academic

self-concept scores were still more likely to be enrolled in honors classes if they had been tracked (placed in high ability groups).

Figure 5: Model of High ability grouping and ASCS predicting enrollment in honors (N=95)

Model	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	P-Value
Academic Self-Concept	2.9	.5-17.59	.23
Tracking 1=yes 0=no	4.42	1.47 – 13.26	.008

Note: Confidence interval is wide because of the small sample size

Predictors of Enrollment in Honors and Advanced Classes

Regression analysis was conducted to examine enrollment in honors and institute classes (see Figures 6 and 7) while controlling for ethnicity, generational status, grade, sex and years in district. This analysis revealed that grade, years in district and tracking were significant predictors of enrollment in honors. Students who lived in the district for six or more years were seven times more likely to be enrolled in honors classes. The data shows that the number of years a student has lived in the district is a significant predictor for enrollment in honors classes but not Institutes.

Figure 6: Model of school level factors predicting enrollment in honors

		Odds ratio	95% Confidence Interval	P-Value
HAP	No	1.00	-	-
	Yes	.83	.21-3.33	.801
Middle School Tracking	No	1	-	-
	Yes	3.58	1.09-11.73	.034
Grade	9	1	-	-
	10	4.09	1.22-13.67	.021
Years in district	Less than 6	1	-	-
	6 year +	6.49	1.98-21.27	.002

The school district could claim that their influence in preparing students for six years or more results in an increased likelihood that these students will be enrolled in honors. The district would have to explain why living in the district for six or more years is not a significant predictor of enrollment in Institutes. It may be that the requirement of having to write a letter for admission, as well as students' claim that teachers and guidance counselor discourage enrollment in Institutes, (because the workload is very heavy and the curriculum is rigorous) serve as structural barriers that inhibit students from selecting this track

Figure 7: Model of school level factors predicting enrollment in institutes

		Odds ratio	95% Confidence Interval	P-Value
HAP	No	1.00	---	---
	Yes	1.38	0.34-5.58	0.65
Middle School Tracking	No	1.00	---	---
	Yes	1.71	0.50-5.83	0.39
Grade	9	1.00	---	---
	10	4.20	1.33-13.37	0.01
Years in district	Less than 6	1.00	---	---
	6 year +	1.85	0.50-6.93	0.36

This researcher examined generational status in this study in order to investigate whether there was an association between academic achievement and generational status. A review of the data revealed that 70% of the study populations' mothers and/or fathers were not born in the US. This means that the majority of study participants would be considered first- generation Americans. The data from the regression analysis presented in Figures 8 and 9 shows that there was no statistical significance related to generational

status and enrollment of honors or Institutes. The findings from this study do not support theories attributing a relationship between academic achievement and generational status.

Figure 8: Model of ethnicity as a predictor for enrollment in honors

		Point Estimate	95% Wald Confidence Limits	P-Value
HAP	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.81	0.19-3.55	0.79
Middle School tracking	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	3.28	0.96-11.21	0.58
Grade	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	5.69	1.32-24.56	0.02
Years in district	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	7.08	1.97-25.48	0.003
Sex	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	1.06	0.28-4.14	0.93
Black Caribbean	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.32	0.07-1.63	0.17
Black Hispanic	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.34	0.04-2.79	0.32
Born in US	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	1.30	0.30—5.76	0.72

A review of the regression analysis conducted for prediction of enrollment in Institutes using the same variables as the analysis for prediction of enrollment in honors classes found similar results (see Figure 9). Tenth graders were five times more likely to be enrolled in honors classes than ninth graders. Tenth graders were six times more likely to be enrolled in Institutes than ninth graders, and students who were highly tracked were almost twice as likely to be enrolled in Institutes.

Figure 9: Model of ethnicity as a predictor for enrollment in institutes

		Point Estimate	95% Wald Confidence Limits	P-Value
HAP	No	1.00	----	---
	Yes	1.90	0.42-8.64	0.41
Middle School tracking	No	1.00	----	---
	Yes	1.93	0.53-7.05	0.32
Grade	No	1.00	----	----
	Yes	6.02	1.32-27.35	0.02
Years in district	No	1.00	---	---
	Yes	1.62	0.41-6.46	0.49
Sex	No	1.00	---	---
	Yes	0.82	0.16-4.34	0.82
Black Caribbean	No	1.00	----	----
	Yes	0.41	0.07-2.44	0.33
Black Hispanic	No	1.00	----	---
	Yes	2.45	0.31-19.36	0.40
Born in US	No	1.00	---	---
	Yes	0.83	0.17-4.06	0.82

The finding that grade is predictor for honors and institutes may be related to the fact that prior to entering high school many parents and students are provided limited information about how to enroll in honors classes. Once the student is in the high school system, the information for honors enrollment, including self-selection, is more readily accessible. These findings suggest that there are institutional and structural barriers that prevent students from enrolling in honors and advanced classes.

In summary, regression analysis conducted using SPSS, confirmed that tracking is a powerful predictor for enrollment in honors and advanced classes (see Figure 6). A student who was placed in high level classes in middle school has a three times greater chance to be enrolled in honors than a student who was not placed in a high level class. In addition, it is worth noting that in Figure 7 (although this is not statistically significant because of the small sample size) a student who has been placed in high level is twice as likely to be enrolled in an Institute than is a student who has not been placed in a high-level track. This data provides evidence that structural inequality is promoted through tracking. Black student in West Orange High School do not have equal access to quality education because they less likely to be placed in high-level classes by teachers or guidance counselors. As noted by Gamoran (1992), “Tracking adds to inequality when placement in a high-status track permits students to gain more than if they been assigned to a lower track”. Throughout elementary and middle school white students are predominantly placed and consequently over-represented in high-level classes and Blacks are under-represented in these classes. The non-institute honors classes in West Orange High School are very racially diverse, as reported by the students in the study. However, structural inequities and institutional discrimination are evident in the over-representation of Whites and under-representation of Blacks in institutes.

Tracking Rules but Parents Matter

This study’s findings indicate that parents have a significant impact on their children’s academic achievement. This is something that most researchers and educators believe. In spite of teachers’ discouraging comments, study respondents had positive beliefs about their intelligence and honors classes. These research findings revealed that parents were influential in shaping students’ perceptions of their intellectual capacity and of honors

classes. Survey respondents reported that their parents repeatedly told them that they were very intelligent. The majority of those students interviewed (seven of the eight enrolled in honors) reported that their parents influenced their decision to enroll in honors classes. These students reported that even if their parents did not fully understand the role of honors classes, they still encouraged their children to enroll in them because they provide the best available educational opportunity. Sixty-two percent of those students whose parents influenced their decisions also had high ability grouping experience. Conversely, only 37% of study participants who were placed in high ability groups indicated that their parents did not influence their decision, to enroll or refrain from enrolling in honors and/or advanced classes (see Table 44).

TABLE 44: Parental influence of students who were placed in high ability groups

Parent (s) Influence Honors	N	%
No	60	37.1
Yes	35	62.9
Total	95	

P-Value = .0020

It is interesting to note that students who had not experienced high ability grouping revealed that they had as much self-confidence in their academic ability as students who were tracked (see Table 33). High ability grouping, and perhaps more importantly, the fact that a student was not selected for placement in higher level classes did not appear to influence students' confidence in their academic ability.

Another key area of interest in this study was whether a parents' educational background influenced their child's decision to enroll in honors classes. It is common for parents in suburban communities to possess college and/or professional degrees. When a parent(s)

possesses a college education, it is likely that they would instill in their children positive beliefs of their intelligence and intellectual capacity. Indeed many of the students' interviewed reported that their parents did convey these messages to them. This appears to be reflected in the study finding that students' whose parents possessed a bachelor's degree or higher had the highest academic self-concept scores. Conversely, students whose parents only possessed only a high school degree reflected the lowest academic self-concept scores. Parents' educational background influences student course selection and ultimately academic achievement. This study's data show the profound impact of high tracking and parent's education on students' decisions and experience (see Table 45).

TABLE 45: Parent education of students who were tracked

Parent Education	N	%
High School	5	20.0
Some College	27	29.6
Bachelors	14	50.0
Masters or Professional Degree	34	52.9
Total	80	

P-value = .0360

Parents of the majority of students who were placed in high ability groups had at least a bachelors degree. Parent's educational background did not, however, have as significant an influence as did tracking because 50% of students whose parents had bachelor's degree and 47% of students whose parents had masters or professional degree did not experience high ability grouping (placed in higher level classes). In addition, regression analysis (see Figures 10 and 11) confirmed that parental influence was not a significant predictor of enrollment in honors or advanced classes. Once again, the structural factors of grade and high ability grouping were significant predictors of enrollment in honors and advanced classes The regression analysis shows that high ability grouping (tracking) is a

major predictor for enrollment in honors and advanced classes at West Orange High

School. These findings clearly show that tracking influences Black student by creating unequal access to higher classes.

Figure 10: Model of parent factors as a predictor of student Enrollment in honors classes

		Point Estimate	95% Confidence interval	P- Value
HAP	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	1.73	.27-11.27	0.57
Middle School tracking	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	3.95	0.90-17.33	0.07
Grade	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	4.41	0.90-21.49	0.07
Lunch	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.70	0.18-2.65	0.59
Mom born in the US	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.68	0.28-10.30	0.57
Dad born in the US	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.24	0.03-1.72	0.16
Both parents in home	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.78	0.19-3.15	0.73
Own house	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	3.01	0.63-14.37	0.17
Parents education	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	2.24	0.59-9.99	0.22

Figure 11: Model of parent factors as a predictor of student enrollment in institutes

		Point Estimate	95% Wald Confidence interval	P-Value
HAP	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	1.76	0.30-10.26	0.53
Middle School tracking	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	1.36	0.28-6.53	0.70
Grade	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	9.00	1.81-44.79	0.01
Lunch	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.28	0.06-1.28	0.10
Mom born in the US	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	2.91	0.49-17.20	0.24
Dad born in the US	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.85	0.16-4.66	0.86
Both parents in home	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	1.05	0.25-4.37	0.94
Own house	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.51	0.12-2.28	0.38
Parents education	No	1.00	1.00	---
	Yes	0.51	0.10-2.65	0.42

Chapter 9: Discussion & Conclusion

Discussion

This research study sought to identify and investigate factors that may affect Black suburban students' decisions to enroll or refrain from enrolling in honors and advanced classes in a racially diverse suburban public high school. Enrollment in honors and advanced classes are factors that often are used to measure what is known as the academic achievement gap between Black and White students ((J. Ogbu, 2003; Tyson et al., 2005). Other factors frequently used to measure the Black-White academic achievement gap are high school graduation rates, college graduation rates and standardized test scores (Duncan, 2011). I chose to examine the factors related to class enrollment because I wanted to better understand individual and system-level factors as well as the role of social and cultural factors that may influence their course selection decisions.

A major consideration of this study is that disparities in the enrollment of Black and White suburban high school students in honors and advanced classes may be reflective of differences in the opportunities afforded to these students rather than differences in their achievement. Black students' decisions to enroll in honors and advanced classes may be affected by the fact they are not afforded the same educational opportunities as White students. In racially diverse suburban schools Black students are often not afforded the opportunity of being placed in higher-level classes by guidance counselors and teachers (Tyson, 2011). As consequence, Black suburban students are frequently enrolled in lower level classes and this can influence their beliefs about their academic abilities as well as their academic outcomes.

This research study explored a wide range of factors, including academic self-concept, ability grouping, length of time in district, generational status and socioeconomic indicators, to determine how these factors affect the academic choices that are made by Black students in racially diverse suburban public high schools. In addition, the study sought to learn about Black students' perceptions of the academic opportunities in their high school as well as to gain insight to their academic experiences in their own words. This research brings to light significant findings related to Black students' perceptions and experiences that influence their class enrollment decisions.

Oppositional Culture

The qualitative and quantitative findings of this study revealed that the majority of students (both honor & non-honors) have positive perceptions of honors and advanced classes. These students consistently reported that students who work hard will succeed in honors and advanced classes. They indicated that they believe colleges will be influenced by the fact that a student applying for admission has taken honors or advanced classes. The interviewed students reported that students who are not enrolled in honors or advanced classes often look favorably upon honors students and would in fact ask for help from honors students. These findings are in contrast to research addressing the Black-White academic achievement gap among middle class Black and White students which commonly blame students or their parents for Black students' lack of achievement (Ferguson, 2006; J. Ogbu, & Simons, H., 1998). Their studies assert that Black students don't want to work hard and/or they are concerned that they will be perceived as acting white if they achieve academically. I could not however find any studies that substantiate these claims. In fact, data from this study shows that Black suburban students are

interested in succeeding academically and they would welcome the opportunity to be enrolled in honors. The findings in this study contradict the oppositional culture theory and burden of acting of White. There was no indication that the students had developed an oppositional culture or that they feared being accused of acting white.

Student Disengagement

The research findings in this study did not substantiate the claim that Black students are substantially more disengaged than White students. Students overwhelmingly reported positive beliefs about honors and advanced classes. The students who were not enrolled in honors classes indicated that they wished that could have taken honors classes. These students stated they would welcome the challenge of advanced classes. These results suggest that Black students are as motivated as Whites and they are not disengaged from their academic experience. However, as indicated by Roach (2004), Black students may lack study skills needed to improve their learning. This study shows that Black students are more likely to be placed in lower level classes where worksheets are being used as the primary method of instruction and they may not have had an opportunity to develop higher-level study or critical thinking skills. Therefore even the Black students are engaged in school and indicate they would welcome the opportunity to enroll in honors classes, they are not generally given the same preparation for or access to higher-level learning opportunities.

Achievement Ethos

The qualitative and quantitative findings from this study revealed contradictions to the belief that Black students do not value education. It was noted the study conducted by Cook and Ludwig (1998) that Black students do not value education and do not possess

an achievement ethos. Students who participated in the interviews verbalized the importance of enrolling in honors and advanced classes. Students who were not enrolled in honors indicated that they would have liked to enroll in honors classes. The majority of survey participants also reported these classes were important and that they would recommend that students enroll in honors and advanced classes. They indicated that students learn more in honors and institutes than in non-honors classes. These students would also encourage other students to enroll in their best subjects and work hard. These results also contradict Mickelson's study (1990) indicating that Black students have an only have an abstract value in education. The students' in this study indicated that the understanding and belief that higher-level education would be beneficial to their futures. The students' concern about taking only courses they are good in, support the findings in Tyson's study that Black students select classes based on their perceived ability to do well in the class (Tyson et al., 2005). The students in this study consistently indicated that they valued education and desired to succeed academically.

Social Reproduction and Critical Race Theory

The students who were interviewed noted that students in Horizons, which is the lowest ability grouping in the high school, are known as having disciplinary, behavioral problems or other learning challenges. A student, who was interviewed during this study and was enrolled in Horizons, indicated that the Horizon students are separated from the majority of the student's on the school campus for instruction and they enter their classrooms from a separate entrance. This student reported that being in Horizon made her feel isolated from the rest of the student body. The stigma connected to this population which is predominantly Black is felt by all of the Black students not just the

ones enrolled in Horizons. This program is an example of the stratification present in the ability groups in this school. As Macleod (1995) argues the messages about Black intellectual inferiority are markedly evident and Blacks being viewed as lower (in class levels) than Whites suggests that the school is converting social hierarchies into academic hierarchies. As previously stated, critical race theorists believe that schools replicate society and maintain the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995). West Orange High School reflects this replication process with Whites maintaining the societal status quo by predominating the higher-level classes and Blacks are placed at the bottom, in lower-level classes. The students in higher-level classes receive more challenging and rigorous instruction with a focus on developing critical thinking skills. In sharp contrast, the lower-level instruction provided in Horizons focuses on basic skills. The basic skills taught in Horizons curriculum versus critical thinking skill taught in institutes are examples of the inequities inherent in the ability groups. It is a clear indication that students in the various ability groups in this high school do not receive the same quality of education.

Critical race theorists continue to argue that race is a significant factor in determining inequity in school, especially in light of evidence that middle class Black students are not achieving at the same level as middle class White students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Parents' efforts to address the racial inequities and ensure that their children have access to a quality education have been unsuccessful. When Black parents complained to the West Orange Board of Education that their children were under-represented in honors classes, the district hired consultants to conduct an equity audit at the high school. The equity audit findings, completed in 2011, did not even mention that the implementation of institutes, which occurred in 2009, resulted in another structural barrier that separate

White students and Blacks during class instruction. None of the racial differences or disparities that are evident in the small learning communities were addressed. The West Orange Board of Education has failed to identify or address the structural inequities that are evident in the ability grouping practices, which result in an unequal access to education opportunities throughout the district.

Academic self-concept

Academic self-concept is defined as the individual's self-perception of their academic ability (Strein, 1993b). The influence of students' academic self-concept in their decision whether to enroll in honors classes was pivotal. Quantitative data revealed that as hypothesized, parents' have a strong and positive influence on their children's academic self-concept. During the interviews, students reported their parents' reinforcement of the belief that they were intelligent. The students rated their own intelligence as above average and indicated their parents had a strong belief in their intellectual capacity, which parents communicated constantly. This finding suggests parental influence can shape their children's academic self-concept.

This study's findings clearly also indicate that academic self-concept is influenced by experiences with ability grouping and that there is a link between students' experiences with being selected for high-level classes from Kindergarten through high school and their belief in their academic abilities. The quantitative data obtained from the scoring of Reynolds' Academic Self-Concept Scale (Reynolds, 1988) revealed that the students who were enrolled in honors classes received higher academic self-concept scores (see Table 32). In addition, there was a correlation between the number of honors classes in which students were enrolled and academic self-concept scores. The results showed the greater

the number of honors classes the higher their academic self-concept score (see Table 33). Students who enrolled in the highest number of honors classes had the lowest academic self-doubt regarding their abilities (see Table 35). This data also showed (see Table 34 – “Enrollment in Honors by ASCS IV”) that there was no statistical difference in the self-confidence relating to academic ability for students enrolled and not enrolled in honors classes. Students who were not enrolled in honors classes did however receive lower academic self-concept scores on items that indicate self-doubt regarding ability (see Table: 34). The data suggests that enrollment in honors and advanced classes can positively influence a student’s academic self-concept and conversely, not being selected for enrollment in honors and advances can send students the message that they are intellectually inferior. Positive self-confidence in academic ability also does not ensure that a student will be enrolled in higher-level classes.

Ability Grouping

Ability grouping (previously known as tracking) has been used as a societal sorting mechanism and was initially introduced to separate White affluent society from the working and industrial classes. In the late 1800’s to early 1900’s working-class White students were tracked to vocational programs while affluent White students were placed in college preparatory programs. As studies provided evidence that tracking was providing to white working class students with unequal access to college preparatory education, this practice began to subside (Gamoran, 1992a; Oakes, 1985). After *Brown vs. Board of Education*, tracking re-emerged under a new name, ability grouping, to address the desire of Whites in the North and South to continue school segregation.

Ability grouping is not only used in West Orange High School, teachers or guidance counselors in elementary schools and middle schools also utilize this practice which frequently results in Whites students being placed in high-level classes and Black students in lower-level classes. The mechanism, that makes this structural inequity possible, is ability grouping and it manifests in racialized tracking when it is utilized within racially diverse suburban school districts. Studies addressing the effect of ability grouping consistently reveal that this practice is ineffective (Gamoran, 1992b; Tyson et al., 2005). In fact, John Hattie's (2008) extensive analysis of more than 300 studies addressing ability grouping concluded that, "tracking has minimal effects on learning outcome and profound negative effects on equity outcomes". Despite this evidence of ineffectiveness, ability grouping continues to be utilized in school districts throughout the United States.

West Orange School District continues to the practice of ability grouping and as previously noted in 2009, this school district implemented an additional level of ability grouping known as Institutes. This new tracking practice was implemented during a time where there were wide spread complaints from the community that Black students were under represented in honors classes. Regression analysis conducted for this study (see Models 4 and 5) shows that ability grouping is a major predictor for enrollment in honors and advanced classes at West Orange High School. These results show that systematic structural discrimination that is occurring within the West Orange School District through the practice of ability grouping. Black students are being tracked to lower level classes throughout their academic career in the district. The structural inequality that occurs as a result of ability grouping is evident in every level of schooling

within the West Orange school district. In-school segregation of White and Black students, which is the result of the over-representation of White students and under-representation of Black students in high-level classes adds to racial stereotypes and perpetuates an image of mental inferiority of Blacks. In Kindergarten Black students observe that the majority of students who are placed in the high aptitude program (HAP) are White. They are sent messages at that young age that they are not as smart as the White students who were selected for HAP. When these students enter middle school, they are once more subjected to and experience racial stratification in the levels of education provided to the students. The high-level math and English classes are predominated by White students and the lower level math and English are predominated by Black students. There are clear messages being disseminated about race and intelligence. Black students in lower level classes are being sent daily messages that they are mentally inferior to the students in higher-level classes, whom are consistently predominantly White. Teachers and guidance counselors perpetuate this racial discrimination because they are the gatekeepers who determine which tracks the students are assigned to. These findings support and provide additional evidence (Tyson, 2011) that structural inequality is inherent in ability grouping.

Teacher perceptions, expectations and bias

Black students are noted as being more responsive to positive reinforcement from teachers than White students. An experiment conducted by Claude Steele revealed that when Black students were told by their teachers that they were using high standards and that they believed the students could meet those standards, Black students far more than any other racial group responded positively to the challenge (C. Steele, 1999). This is an important finding considering its potential relationship to ability grouping and the

influence teachers can have in the determination of students' academic paths.

Receiving affirmation from teachers and guidance counselors in the form of selection for enrollment in advanced classes can have the effect of increasing students' confidence in the academic ability and their belief in their own intelligence. Selection by teachers or guidance counselors for high-level classes has a significant influence on not only how they perceive their academic ability (academic self-concept) but also on their confidence in their academic ability. When students' confidence in their ability is bolstered by a teacher or guidance counselor affirmation that they will do well, the overall potential for academic success of the student is increased. Not to mention the enhanced access to educational opportunities which are not afforded to students who are enrolled in lower-level classes.

The role that teachers play in the discriminatory practices evident in tracking Black students to lower level classes cannot be under-estimated. Teachers, as previously stated are the gatekeepers who determine which tracks students are assigned to. Teacher's decision to place Black students, especially Black male students in lower level classes may be related to their unconscious bias (Kristof, 2008). This unconscious bias can lead to racial discrimination. This study suggests that a consequence of teacher bias is evident in the fact that Black males are less likely to be selected by teachers or guidance counselors to enroll in high-level classes and more likely to be tracked to lower level classes.

Equally as important is the influence that teachers have through the daily interactions and communication with the students. Evidence of this bias is illustrated in this study through the interactions of Black suburban students in higher-level classes and their teachers. As

previously noted, the practice of several teachers to call all four (4) Black girls in the Institute of Math and Science by the same name shows an insensitivity and lack of respect for these girls. It appears that teachers don't see them as individuals. They are just basically seen as "the Black girls" without an attempt to distinguish or acknowledge their individuality. Teacher bias is also evident in the interview finding that revealed teachers in the high-level classes will often ask to see Black students' schedules on the first day of school, because they think they may be in the wrong class. These interactions are examples of micro-aggressions that Black students are subjected to from teachers and other school faculty. Micro-aggressions are subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges that are put downs of blacks by offenders (Pierce, 1977). These micro-aggressions can often go unnoticed by the victims affected by them. This may be why the research findings in this study indicated that the majority of students stated that teachers have the same expectations for all students, regardless of race.

Stereotype Threat

The students in the interviews consistently reported that all students were treated the same by teachers and that teachers primarily used objective criteria such as grades to determine who should enroll in honors classes. The majority of these students also reported that they had not witnessed nor been victim of any discriminatory acts pertaining to their race. However, the same students reported instances, which appear to be discriminatory such as being called the same name by several teachers and being asked to check their schedules because the teachers did not believe they were enrolled in institutes. The fact that the students did not want to label these situations as discriminatory may be reflective of their protective response to stereotype threats and micro-aggressions. As indicated by Schmader (2008) how individuals interpret their experience when under

threat plays a critical role in affecting their performance. Viewing these circumstances as not being discriminatory allows the student to remain engaged in the educational process. These findings also suggest that students experiencing stereotype threat and micro-aggressions may not always recognize the cues when they are subtle.

The affect of stereotype threat on student's course taking selections in racially diverse suburban high schools cannot however be negated. The presence of stereotype threats can pressure a student to view school achievement as not related to their self-evaluation or personal identity (C. M. Steele & Aronson, 1995). Data from this research study also indicates that the presence of a strong academic self-concept cannot ensure that a Black suburban student will choose to enroll in high-level classes. It is important to note that students with stronger academic identities and skills are more like experience greater pressure from stereotype threat than students with weaker academic identity and skills. The students with stronger academic self-concepts may worry more that their futures may be compromised by society's perception and treatment of their group (C. Steele, 1999). The results from this study support this belief because the students with high academic self-concepts did not consistently enroll in honors or advanced classes. Although Black students may report being unaware of any racial discrimination within the school, stereotype threat and micro-aggressions that they experience subconsciously can influence their decisions to enroll or refrain from enrolling in honors and advanced classes.

Conclusion

This study adds to the discourse about factors that contribute to the Black-White academic-achievement gap. It sheds light on significant differences between educational opportunities that are provided to Black and White students in racially diverse suburban public schools. Black families frequently choose to move to suburban neighborhoods in order to provide their children with a better education than what is offered in lower income urban communities (Stokes, 1988). However, in spite of the wealth of resources that are available in these suburban school districts, Black student academic achievement often lags significantly behind those of White students (Jencks, 1998). Concerning the under-representation of Black students in honors or advanced classes, in racially diverse suburban public schools, this research study addresses theories such as oppositional culture and the fear of acting White (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; J. Ogbu, 2004) as well as racialized tracking and in school segregation (Tyson, 2011; Tyson et al., 2005). This study investigated these theories along with other factors such as academic self-concept, generational status and parental influence were investigated to determine if they influenced Black students' decision to enroll in honors and advanced classes. This research differed from other studies as it provides an insider's perspective of Black suburban students, which was gained through interviews and surveys that gave students an opportunity to voice their perceptions and experiences.

Contrary to John Ogbu's (2004), findings this study found that Black suburban students do not possess an oppositional culture and they are not afraid of acting White. In fact, the majority of students in the study had positive comments and beliefs about honors and advanced classes. They reflected an understanding of the importance of enrolling in honors and advanced classes; and most of these students (even those who were not

enrolled in honors and advanced classes) indicated that they would encourage other students to enroll in these classes. The primary concern articulated by the majority of students was whether they would do well in a course and their recommendations to other students focused on advising the students to only take classes they would do well in. These findings do not corroborate theories by John Ogbu (2003) that the Black –White academic achievement in racially diverse suburban communities are related to students' oppositional culture and fear of acting White.

Students in this study who were not enrolled in honors indicated that they would have liked to enroll in honors classes and that they were not aware that their parents could enroll them even without a recommendation from teachers or guidance counselors. Students consistently reported that they believed teachers' or guidance counselors' recommendations are needed for enrollment in honors classes. It was less known that a parent or guardian could also enroll their child into an honors class without a faculty recommendation. This finding shows that the lack of understanding about the process for enrollment presents another barrier that contributes to the under-representation of Blacks in honors and advanced classes.

The study's results revealed that the majority of participants' parents were born outside of the United States and therefore these students would be considered first-generation Americans. The data from the regression analysis presented in Models 6 and 7 show that there was no statistical significance related to generational status and enrollment of honors or Institutes. The findings from this study do not support theories (J. Ogbu, & Simons, H., 1998) attributing a relationship between academic achievement and generational status. These research finding do however support Mitchell's (2005)

findings that there is no evidence of a difference in students' academic self-concept scores in relationship to generational status.

Differences in socioeconomic status are generally noted as key factors that contribute to the Black-White academic achievement gap. However, contrary to existing research (Ladson-Billings, 1995) arguing that the cause of the Black-White academic achievement gap is related to differences in the socio-economic status of Black and White students, this study provides evidence that socioeconomic status is not as significant an influence on academic achievement as ability grouping. There was no difference in the academic achievement of the Black students who received free or reduced lunch and those who did not. Even when parents possessed indicators of a higher socioeconomic status, such as homeownership and a college education, these factors could not outweigh the structural inequality and negative impact of system-level factors such as racialized tracking.

This study did find that role of parents is however central to the development of students' beliefs in their intellectual capacity, which was confirmed through academic self-concept ratings and students' self-reported intelligence ratings. The students in the study generally rated themselves as smart and above average in intelligence. They consistently reported positive beliefs and a desire to enroll in honors and advanced classes. Yet, despite positive academic self-concept and parental influence, racialized tracking inhibits Black students ability to enroll in honors and advanced classes

This research study provides evidence that public schools in racially diverse suburban school districts are places where access to educational opportunities is not the same for Black and White students. Data from this research indicates that ability group

significantly influences course selection and academic self-concept. Students who experienced high ability grouping (who were placed in high level classes) were 5.6 times more likely to be enrolled in honors classes than students who had not been tracked. The earlier in the academic career that the student experienced high-ability tracking, the more likely they would be enrolled in high-level classes in high school. A history of high-ability tracking was shown to have a powerful influence on the student's enrollment in honor and/or advanced classes. Eighty-three percent of the students who were enrolled in the highest level of tracking via Institutes at the high school had experienced high ability grouping as early as elementary school. Students who were tracked were more likely to be enrolled in honors classes than students who may have rated themselves as intelligent and/or who had high academic self-concept scores. This study's findings indicate that even when controlling for academic self-concept, high ability grouping was still significantly associated with enrollment in honors classes.

This study provides evidence of systematic discrimination that is promulgated by the ongoing utilization of ability groups and results in an unequal access to educational opportunities. Although students in the study reported increased diversity in the student enrollment in honors classes, there is currently an over-representation of White students and under-representation of Blacks in what is now deemed the highest academic track (Institutes) in the high school, and this continues to manifest in in-school segregation. Significantly absent in institutes are Black males. It's important to note that only 11% of the study population was enrolled in Institutes (see Table 22), however 45% of HAP students (placed in high-level groups in elementary school) are enrolled in an Institute (see Table 43). These results provide significant evidence that institutional policies and

practices involving ability grouping have a powerful and negative affect on Black student's access to higher-level classes.

The complexity of resolving the structural inequity and institutionalized racism that are manifested through ability grouping was made evident in the fact that when the parents in the district complained about the under-representation of Blacks in honor classes, this school district responded by implementing a new level of ability grouping known as Institutes. As the number of Blacks enrolled in honors increased, this new level of ability grouping serves as a means to continue racialized tracking and in-school segregation. The majority of White students in West Orange High School continue to receive class instruction separately from Black students. The method of instruction also changed since the implementation of institutes. Honors classes are now using worksheets instead of textbooks as a part of their coursework. This data also reveals that the majority of classes utilizing textbooks are in the Institutes. This sheds some light on differential teaching and instruction that is provided based on the track level. The desire of Black parents to obtain a quality education for their children in these racially diverse suburban public schools is not being achieved because of the differences in teaching and instruction related to track level. Students (predominantly White) in higher levels are taught through a curriculum that is designed to develop leadership and critical thinking skills. Black students who are often placed in lower level track are not receiving the same level of education.

The effects of this in-school segregation on Black students relative to their perceptions of race and intelligence is also harmful and far-reaching. It may not impact Black student's personal belief that they are intelligent, but one cannot discount the effect of daily messages as manifested through this practice (ability grouping) that Whites and Asians

are more intelligent than Blacks. Even when Black parents are highly educated and instill a positive sense of belief in the children about their academic abilities, the messages conveyed through in-school segregation can cause to refrain from enrolling high-level classes.

This study demonstrates how ability grouping has been utilized to create a caste system in racially diverse suburban schools. All of this being done under the pretext that, as described by Jeannie Oakes (2005) that in almost all schools, choice has become an increasingly salient factor in placing students into tracks, shifting the responsibility for differentiated opportunities, resources and expectations from schools to students. However, the truth of the matter is that ability grouping continues to present barriers and impede access to educational opportunities for students of color and racial segregation continues to exist within racially diverse suburban school districts.

Recommendations

The findings from this study provides additional evidence that on-going use of ability groupings promulgates racialized tracking and results in unequal access to educational opportunities, which, in turn, contributes to the proliferation of the Black-White academic achievement gap. A logical recommendation would be the immediate elimination of ability grouping from all racially diverse public schools. This is not something that can be easily achieved and may even require that parents file legal charges against school districts utilize ability grouping. A short-term recommendation that could be immediately implemented would be to improve communication with parents and students about how to enroll in honors and advanced classes. There needs to be wide spread communication

and documentation in the district's curriculum bulletin that a parent or guardian can also enroll their child into an honors class without faculty recommendation. In fact, the entire class selection and enrollment process should be examined. Teachers and guidance counselors should be informed that they should not dissuade students from enrolling in high-level classes by stressing the amount of work and rigor involved. Students should be encouraged to challenge themselves. There is also need for the West Orange Board of Education to investigate the differential teaching and instruction provided in the various levels of tracks. The differences, in the instruction provided to students in lower-level classes and higher level classes, could result in students being ill prepared to succeed in higher level classes in high school and potentially affect their performance in college. Finally, in view of the limitations in analysis that stemmed from the small study population size, I would recommend that these factors being investigated further using a larger sample population. It would be helpful to gain insight from a larger sample of students. It would be interesting to include White students in a future study in order to evaluate and compare their perceptions and experiences.

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APPENDICES

Appendix

Permission to Conduct Study Granted by Superintendent of School/Notification of Principal.....	A
Interview letter of Solicitation and Informed Consent Form for Parents.....	B
Interview letter of Solicitation and Student Assent Form.....	C
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Appendix A: Letter of approval to conduct research from the superintendent

- James O'Neill <JONeill@woboe.org>
-
- 07/24/13 at 12:10 PM

To

- Hayden Moore

CC

- Desiree Barber

Message body

Hayden, this will confirm that Ms. Barber spoke to me, explained the research and I reviewed the survey instrument. I have approved the research to take place at West Orange HS during a time period determined to be best by the HS administration and Ms. Barber

Jim O'Neill, Interim Superintendent

West Orange Board of Education

179 Eagle Rock Ave

West Orange, NJ 07052

joneill@woboe.org

973-669-5400 x 20510

Appendix A (continued): Notification of principal

From: Desiree Barber [mailto:desi243@yahoo.com]
Sent: Wednesday, July 24, 2013 12:02 PM
To: Hayden Moore
Cc: James O'Neill
Subject: Dissertation Research at WOHS

My name is Desiree James-Barber and I am a former board member of the West Orange Board of Education, as well as a life-long resident and product of the West Orange School System. Currently I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Urban Systems PhD Program at Rutgers University.

I am writing to inform you that yesterday (July 23, 2013) I met with Superintendent John O'Neill and received approval from him to conduct my doctoral research at West Orange High School. My dissertation topic is Black Suburban Student Enrollment in Honors Classes. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of students' perceptions of honors classes, assess their academic self-concept and examine their academic experiences that may be associated with their decisions to enroll or not enroll in honors classes. All necessary measures have been taken to ensure the confidentiality of the students, school and Town of West Orange.

Initially, I will conduct semi-structured interviews in the community with a small group of students from the high school. The open-ended questions have been designed to solicit responses that will inform the final survey that I would like to administer in the fall of 2013 at the high school. The survey will be administered using Survey Monkey and is divided into four sections: academic self-concept; perceptions of honors classes, academic experiences and demographic information. Ninth and tenth grade English teachers will be asked to administer this questionnaire. Parental consent and student assent will be obtained for each participant. I anticipate having the survey ready to be administered during the month of October 2013.

I would like to meet with you at your earliest convenience, to answer any questions you may have about this study, as well as, to develop a timeframe for conducting the survey at the high school. I can be reached at 973-483-9288 (work) or 973-986-9771 (cell). Thank you in advance for your consideration in this matter and I look forward to working with you to complete my dissertation.

Best regards,

Desiree James-Barber, MPH

Appendix B:

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY Parental Consent Form for Student Participants

TITLE OF STUDY: Black Suburban Student Enrollment in Honors Classes

INVESTIGATOR: Desiree James-Barber, MSPH

Your child has been invited to participate in a research study called “Black Suburban Student Enrollment in Honors classes. This consent form is part of an informed consent process for this research study that will help you to decide whether you wish to have your child volunteer to participate in this study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions about the research study, you should feel free to contact the principal investigator, Desiree Barber, at 973-986-9771 and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to have your child take part in the study, you can sign this informed consent. The principal investigator, Desiree Barber will also sign this informed consent form. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your or your child’s legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing the consent form.

Why is this study being done?

This study is being done to obtain student’s perceptions and experiences pertaining to factors that may be related to their decisions to enroll or not enroll in honors classes.

Why have you been asked to take part in this study?

Your child has been invited to participate in this study because they are either 9th or 10th grade student at West Orange High School.

Who may take part in this study? And who may not?

All 9th or 10th grade students attending West Orange High School are eligible to participate in this study. Students who do not attend West Orange High School cannot participate in this study.

How long will the study take and how many subjects will participate?

There will be a minimum of ten (10) students and maximum of twenty-five (25) participating in this study. The interview process should take approximately one (1) hour to complete.

What will your child be asked to do if they take part in this research study?

Your child will be asked to participate in an interview about their academic perceptions and experiences.

What are the risk and/or discomforts your child might experience if they take part in this study?

There are no risks or discomfort that you child will experience if they take part in this study.

Are there any benefits for your child to take part in this study?

The benefit of taking part in this study may be that your child will be able to share their perceptions about their academic experiences. In the future this information may be helpful in encouraging students' to take more rigorous classes as well as provide counseling and in-school support that encourages students' to enroll in honors courses, which can result in improved academic achievement.

However, it is possible that your child might receive no direct personal benefit from taking part in this study.

What are your child's alternatives if they do not want to take part in this study?

There are no alternatives available. Your child's alternative is not to take part in this study.

How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether your child is willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, your child will be updated about any new information that may affect whether they are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect your child after the study or follow-up is completed, you will be contacted.

Will there be any cost to your child to take part in this study?

There will be no cost to participate in this study.

Will your child be paid for their participation in this study?

Your child will not be paid but they will receive a \$5 gift card from a fast food franchise for participating in this study.

How will information about your child be kept private or confidential?

All efforts will be made to keep your child's personal information in their research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. The principal investigator, Desiree Barber will conduct the interview and the data will be collected and stored in a locked cabinet in her office. Your child's identity will not be disclosed when sharing information about this study. Field notes will be recorded and interview data will be collected using a unique identifier (a number will be used to identify your child instead of their name). All written field notes will be held in Desiree Barber's locked files. Computer files containing program data on

Desiree Barber and the research assistant's computer will be password protected. Data trends will be reported in aggregate and direct quotes will be unattributed (for example, "Participant B explained that...."). The link between pseudonyms and ID numbers will be destroyed once the study is completed.

What will happen if you do not wish to have your child take part in the study or if you decide later not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not wish to have your child take part in the study, they will not be included. If you decide later not to stay in the study, your child's data will be excluded. Even if you give your permission, your child may choose not to participate or change their mind about participation at any time.

Who can you call if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about taking part in this study, you can call the principal investigator:

Desiree James-Barber, MSPH
 Doctoral Candidate
 Joint Urban Systems Ph.D. Program
 973-986-9771

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research subject, you can call:

The IRB Director
 973-972-3608

What are your child's rights if you decide to have them take part in this research study?

Your child has the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

Your signature in the space below indicates that you agree to have your child participate in this study.

Name of student: _____

Signature of parent: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:

Signature of principal investigator: _____ Date: _____

CONSENT FOR USE OF AUDIO-TAPING

As a part of this project, audio recordings will be made of my child's interview by the principal investigator. I understand that I can refuse audiotaping and my child can still participate in the study. I understand that I will not be identified in any publication using the data from audiotaped interviews.

The foregoing authorizations are given subject to the condition that:

1. My child will not be identified in any publication using data from this audiotaped interview.
2. I understand that the making of tape recordings is subject to the approval and supervision of the study investigators and the IRB. I understand that all tape recordings shall be played for the undersigned if she/he requests this. All recordings will be destroyed at the request of the undersigned.
3. I understand that tape recorded interviews will not be used for commercial or public media purposes.

Parent signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C:

INVITATION TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY
Student Assent

TITLE OF STUDY: Black Suburban Student Enrollment in Honors Classes

INVESTIGATOR: Desiree James-Barber, MSPH

You have been invited to participate in a research study called “Black Suburban Student Enrollment in Honors classes. This consent form is part of an informed consent process for this research study that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer to participate in this study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions about the research study, you should feel free to contact the principal investigator, Desiree Barber at 973-986-9771 and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you can sign this informed consent. The principal investigator, Desiree Barber will also sign this informed consent form. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing the consent form.

Why is this study being done?

This study is being done to obtain your perceptions and experiences pertaining to factors that may be related to your decision to enroll or not enroll in honors classes.

Why have you been asked to take part in this study?

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are either 9th or 10th grade student at West Orange High School.

Who may take part in this study? And who may not?

All 9th or 10th grade students attending West Orange High School are eligible to participate in this study. Students who do not attend West Orange High School cannot participate in this study.

How long will the study take and how many subjects will participate?

There will be a minimum of ten (10) students and maximum of twenty-five (25) participating in this study. The interview process should take approximately one (1) hour to complete.

What will you be asked to do if they take part in this research study?

You will be asked to participate in an interview about your academic perceptions and experiences.

What are the risk and/or discomforts you might experience if they take part in this study?

There are no risks or discomfort that you will experience if you take part in this study.

Are there any benefits for you to take part in this study?

The benefit of taking part in this study is that you will be able to share your perceptions about your academic experiences. In the future this information may be helpful in encouraging students' to take more rigorous classes as well as provide counseling and in-school support that encourages students' to enroll in honors courses, which can result in improved academic achievement.

However, it is possible that you might receive no direct personal benefit from taking part in this study.

What are your alternatives if you do not want to take part in this study?

There are no alternatives available. Your alternative is not to take part in this study.

How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you after the study or follow-up is completed, you will be contacted.

Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?

There will be no cost to participate in this study.

Will you be paid for your participation in this study?

You will not be paid but you will receive a \$5 gift card from a fast food franchise for participating in this study.

How will information about you be kept private or confidential?

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in the research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. The principal investigator, Desiree Barber will conduct the interview and the data will be collected and stored in a locked cabinet in her office. Your identity will not be disclosed when sharing information about this study. Field notes will be recorded and interview data will be collected using a unique identifier (a number will be used to identify you instead of your name). All written field notes will be held in Desiree Barber's locked files. Computer files containing program data on Desiree Barber and the research assistant's computer will be password protected. Data trends will be reported in aggregate and direct quotes will be unattributed (for example, "Participant B explained that...."). The link between pseudonyms and ID numbers will be destroyed once the study is completed.

What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you decide later not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or change your mind at any time.

Who can you call if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about taking part in this study, you can call the principal investigator:

Desiree James-Barber, MPH
Doctoral Candidate
Joint Urban Systems Ph.D. Program
973-986-9771

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

The IRB Director
973-972-3608

What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

As a part of this project, audio recordings will be made of your interview by the principal investigator. You can refuse audiotaping and you can still participate in the study. You will not be identified in any publication using the data from audiotaped interviews.

4. You will not be identified in any publication using data from this audiotaped interview.
5. The makings of tape recordings are subject to the approval and supervision of the study investigators and the IRB. All tape recordings shall be played for you if you request it. All recordings will be destroyed at your request.
6. The tape-recorded interviews will not be used for commercial or public media purposes.

Signature of Investigator:

Signature of principal investigator: _____ Date: _____

Student Perceptions & Experiences

Were you enrolled in any of the following classes?

- Elementary School – High Aptitude Program classes ___yes ___no
- Middle School: “High” Math classes ___yes ___no
- Middle School: “High” English classes ___yes ___no

- Do you have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)? ___yes ___no
- Are you enrolled in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)?
 ___yes ___no
- Are you enrolled in Institute of Math & Science (IMS)? ___yes ___no

If you are enrolled in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) or Institute of Math & Science (IMS), how and why did you select/decide to enroll?

Enrollment in Honors Classes

- 1) Are you enrolled in honors classes?
- 2) If yes, what are some the reasons why you chose to enroll in honors classes?
- 3) Did your teachers or guidance counselor discuss with you whether or not you should enroll in honors classes?
- 4) If they did, what did they tell you about honors classes?
- 5) Did you enroll in the classes that they recommended?
- 6) What are some of the reasons why you either chose to enroll or not to enroll in honors classes?
- 7) Did your parents enroll you in an honors class that was not recommended by a teacher or guidance counselor?
- 8) How do you think your parents influenced you in your decision either to enroll or not enroll in honors classes?

Perceptions of Honors Classes

- 1) Why do you think people succeed or fail in honors classes?
- 2) Do you think that having taken honors classes influences the colleges to which students apply?
- 3) What advice would you give a student who is trying to decide whether or not to enroll in an honors class?
- 4) Who or what influenced you to take or not take honors classes?
- 4) What criteria do you think teachers use to determine who should be recommended for honors classes?

Perceptions of Discrimination (CRT)

- 1) Have you ever been treated differently or unfairly in school because of your race?
- 2) Can you describe an experience where you witnessed students being treated differently based on race?
- 3) Do you feel that teachers have the same expectations of all students? Why or why not?

Intellectual Perceptions

- 1) How would you describe your intellectual ability?
- 2) How do you see yourself intellectually in comparison to other students?
- 3) Do you feel that teachers treat students differently based on their intellectual ability?

Conclusion:

Is there any additional information you would like to share?

Appendix E: Permission to use Academic Self-Concept Scale

- [William Reynolds <William.Reynolds@humboldt.edu>](mailto:William.Reynolds@humboldt.edu)
-
- 12/07/08 at 3:00 PM

To: [Desiree Barber](#)

Message body

Dear Desiree,

Attached please find a copy of the ASCS. You have my permission to use it in your research.

Good luck,

Bill Reynolds

----- Original Message -----

From: "Desiree Barber" <desi243@yahoo.com>

To: wr9@humboldt.edu

Sent: Friday, December 5, 2008 11:12:32 AM GMT -08:00 US/Canada Pacific

Subject: Academic Self-Concept Scale

Dear Dr. Reynolds,

I am a doctoral student studying Urban Systems in a joint program sponsored by the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey, New Jersey Institute of Technology and Rutgers University. Currently I am researching and developing my dissertation proposal which is focused on the achievement gap. My interest lies in expanding Ogbu's theory of Oppositional Culture by exploring the relationship/correlation between academic self concept and student perception of the school environment. To this end, I would like to obtain a copy of your Academic Self-Concept Scale (specifically the 40 item Likert scale). Could you please advise how to obtain the instrument? Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Note briefly, In the future, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my research topic with you (once I have made considerable progress in the proposal). I am intrigued and inspired by your work.

Respectfully,

Desiree Barber

Community Health Development Consultants

Desiree Barber MPH, Principal

973-243-2455

“When people show you who they are, believe them the first time.”

Maya Angelou

--

William M. Reynolds, Ph.D.

Professor

Department of Psychology

Humboldt State University

Arcata, California 95521

Tel: (707) 826-3162
Fax: (707) 826-4993
email: William.Reynolds@humboldt.edu
web: <http://www.humboldt.edu/~psych/fs/reynolds/reynolds.htm>

“By weighing, we know what things are light, and what heavy. By measuring, we know what things are long, and what short. The relations of all things may be thus determined, and it is of the greatest importance to estimate the motions of the mind.”

--- Meng-tzu (aka Mencius) circa. 335 B.C.E.

Confidentiality Notice: All information in this communication, including any files or attachments, is confidential and for the sole use of the individual to which it is addressed. Unless otherwise stated, any distribution, or copying of this communication in any form is prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, please notify the sender and delete this communication from your system. Thank you for your cooperation.

- [Download](#)

Reynolds ASCS 05 .pdf

Appendix F:**High School Perceptions & Experiences****BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

GENDER: _____ Male _____ Female **Grade:** _____ 9th _____ 10th

RACE: (Select only one answer)

- _____ White (not Hispanic)
 _____ Black – Caribbean, West Indian, African or South American
 _____ Black - African American (not Hispanic)
 _____ Hispanic/Latino – White
 _____ Hispanic/Latino – Black
 _____ Asian, Asian Indian or Pacific Island
 _____ Native American or Alaskan Native
 _____ Other

ETHNICITY:

In what country were you born? _____

If you were not born in U.S., how old were you when you came to the U.S.: _____

What country was mother born? _____

What country was father born? _____

Do you receive Free or Reduced Lunch? _____ yes _____ no

How long has your family lived in West Orange? Less than 1 year _____ 1-3 years _____
 4-5 years _____ 6-10 years _____ More than 10 years _____

#Parents in household: (Select ALL that apply):

_____ mother _____ father _____ guardian

Please indicate if your parents or guardian:

- _____ Own your home
 _____ Rent your home
 _____ Don't know

PARENT(S) EDUCATIONAL BACK GROUND:

(please indicate highest level of education achieved by each person)

	Mother	Father	Guardian
High School _____			
Some College _____			

High School Perceptions & Experiences

Honors Classes:

Are you enrolled in honors classes? _____yes _____no

If you enrolled in honors classes, please indicate who influenced you in your decision to enroll? (select all that all apply)

_____ parents _____siblings _____ other family members _____teachers
 _____ 8th grade guidance counselors _____ high school guidance counselors

If you are enrolled in honors classes, please indicate which honors classes you are taking?

_____ Science _____ Math _____ History _____ English _____Foreign Language

If you are enrolled in honors classes, please indicate which materials are provided by the school for homework? (check all that apply)

Science:	_____ books	_____ worksheets
Math:	_____ books	_____ worksheets
History:	_____ books	_____ worksheets
English:	_____ books	_____ worksheets
Foreign Language:	_____ books	_____ worksheets

Perceptions of academic experiences:

1) Why do you think students succeed or fail in honors classes?

2) Do you think taking honors classes' influences the colleges to which students apply?

3) What advice would you give to a student who is trying to decide whether or not to enroll in an honors class?"

High School Perceptions & Experiences

4) How would you describe your intellectual ability/intelligence (ie, are you smart, very smart, average)?

5) How would you describe your intelligence in comparison to other students?

Listed below are a number of statements concerning school-related attitudes. Rate each item as it pertains to you personally. Base your ratings on how you feel most of the time. Use the following scale to rate each statement:

SD-Strongly Disagree D-Disagree A-Agree SA- Strongly Agree

INDICATE YOUR RESPONSE BY CIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE LETTER(S). Be sure to answer all items. Please respond to each item independently, do not be influenced by your previous choices.

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Being a student is a very rewarding experience. | SD D A SA |
| 2. If I try hard enough, I will be able to get good grades. | SD D A SA |
| 3. Most of the time my efforts in school are rewarded. | SD D A SA |
| 4. No matter how hard I try I do not do well in school. | SD D A SA |
| 5. I often expect to do poorly on exams. | SD D A SA |
| 6. All in all, I feel I am a capable student. | SD D A SA |
| 7. I do well in my course given the amount of time I dedicate to studying. | SD D A SA |
| 8. My parents are not satisfied with my grades. | SD D A SA |
| 9. Others view me as intelligent. | SD D A SA |
| 10. Most classes are easy for me. | SD D A SA |
| 11. I sometimes feel like dropping out of school. | SD D A SA |
| 12. Most of my classmates do better in school than I do. | SD D A SA |
| 13. Most of my teachers think that I am a good student. | SD D A SA |
| 14. At times I feel that high school is too difficult for me. | SD D A SA |
| 15. All in all, I am proud of my grades. | SD D A SA |
| 16. Most of the time while I am taking a test I am confident. | SD D A SA |
| 17. I feel capable of helping others with their class work. | SD D A SA |
| 18. I feel teachers' standards are too high for me. | SD D A SA |
| 19. It is hard for me to keep up with my class work. | SD D A SA |
| 20. I am satisfied with the class assignments that I turn in. | SD D A SA |
| 21. At times I feel like a failure. | SD D A SA |

High School Perceptions & Experiences

22. I feel I do not study enough before a test.	SD D A SA
23. Most exams are easy for me.	SD D A SA
24. I have doubts that I will do well in honors classes.	SD D A SA
25. For me, studying hard pays off.	SD D A SA
26. I have a hard time getting through school.	SD D A SA
27. I am good at scheduling my time.	SD D A SA
28. I have a fairly clear sense of my academic goals.	SD D A SA
29. I'd like to be a better student than I am now.	SD D A SA
30. I often get discouraged about school.	SD D ASA
31. I enjoy doing my homework.	SD D ASA
32. I consider myself a very good student.	SDDA SA
33. I usually get the grades I deserve in my classes.	SD D ASA
34. I do not study as much as I should.	SD DA SA
35. I usually feel on top of my work by finals week.	SD D ASA
36. Others consider me a good student.	SD DA SA
37. I feel that I am better than the average high school student.	SD DA SA
38. In most classes, I feel that my classmates are better prepared than I am	SDDA SA
39. I feel that I do not have the necessary abilities for certain classes.	SDDA SA
40. I have poor study habits.	SDDA SA

Appendix G:

Parental Consent Form for Student Participants

Your child has been invited to participate in a research project, called “An Investigation of Factors Related to Suburban Student Enrollment in Honors Classes”. All of the ninth and tenth grade students at West Orange High School are encouraged to participate in this project. Approximately two hundred students are expected to participate in this study. The purpose of this initiative is gather and analyze data on suburban high school student perceptions and experiences that may be related to their decision to enroll or not enroll in honors classes. The students will complete an on-line survey during their English class.

Participation by your son or daughter is voluntary and she or he may withdraw at any time without penalty. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. Your child’s identity will not be collected and therefore cannot be revealed when sharing information about this study.

Participation in this project does not entail risks to your son or daughter, but rather incurs benefits. Such benefits include the opportunity to provide information that may be helpful in encouraging students to take more rigorous courses that can result in improved academic achievement.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, you may call its principal investigator, Desiree James-Barber at 973-243-2455. If you have any questions regarding your child’s rights as a research subject, you may contact Rutgers University’s IRB Director at 973-972-3608.

If a parent declines their child’s participation and/or if the student does not return a signed parental consent form, the student will not be permitted to participate in this study. The investigator will ensure that these students do not participate in this study because each teacher will verify and only permit students’ who have submitted a signed parental consent form to gain access to the study survey.

Your signature in the space below indicates that you agree to have your child participate in an investigation of factors related to suburban student enrollment in honors classes.

Name of student: _____

Print Name of parent or guardian: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____

Signature of principal investigator: _____

Appendix H:Scoring "Reynolds" - Academic Self-Concept Scale (ASCS)

Assign values of SD=1, D=2, A=3, SA=4

Reverse score (SD=4, D=3, A=2, SA=1) the following items: 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 29, 30, 34, 38, 39 and 40

Sum the items, with a high score indicating a high or strong academic self-concept

To double check the scoring, it is advisable to enter the item data into the computer and run a reliability analysis checking the item-total scale correlations (all should be positive, with negative typically indicating an error in reverse scoring).

For normative information, you can compare your results with those reported in Reynolds (1988) "Measurement of academic self-concept in college students". Journal of Personality Assessment, 52, 223-240.