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"It's Like Two High Schools"

Race, Tracking, and Performance Expectations

So we have great diversity at this school, but it's like two ships traveling in parallel lines—they don't ever really cross.

Ms. Hicks (school counselor)

As Ms. Hicks observes, Riverview is a diverse school. It has been officially desegregated for decades. However, as she also describes, it is far from a model of integration. Once black, Latina/o, and white students pass through Riverview's entrance, they mostly pass by each other on the way to different classrooms. As is true of many high schools across the country, Riverview's academic hierarchy is highly racialized; classrooms are internally segregated, with high-level courses dominated by white students and "basic" classes filled predominantly by black and Latina/o students.[1] In fact, of the many possible measures of "racial achievement gaps" at Riverview, racialized tracking is often the most glaring—it is the physical manifestation of what is otherwise often represented only in abstract statistics. When we spoke to Jim, a school safety officer who'd grown up in Riverview, he described the situation this way:

> We instituted integration and it started in 1967, okay, when I was bused to [elementary school] as a white boy.

Now, we've hardly gone anywhere since 1967 because we just repro-
duce segregation inside the school.

In some ways, the racialized academic hierarchy, what some scholars refer
to as "second-generation segregation," at Riverview is not new. As Jim
suggests, such hierarchies have existed here and elsewhere for as long as
the schools themselves have been desegregated.[2] The question remains,
however, how is it that a school like Riverview, with its expressed com-
mitment to diversity and equity, can have what feels like "old-fashioned"
racial hierarchies embedded within them despite the elimination of for-
mal mechanisms of segregation decades ago?[3] Such hierarchies are not a
manifestation of group-level differences in ability or intelligence. While
once popular, the idea that there are genetic group-level differences in
intelligence has been thoroughly debunked.[4] Even beyond this, however,
as psychologists are increasingly pointing out, the heavy focus on cogni-
tion in trying to understand educational outcomes is largely misplaced.
As Aronson and Steele discuss, academic competence "is not just some-
thing inside a person's head . . . [but] is quite literally the product of real or
imagined interactions with others."[5] For example, as they argue, whether
you feel respected, welcomed, and/or treated well not only shapes social
relations but also influences motivation, performance, and learning.
Intelligence is less stable and more fragile than we typically acknowledge,
and a host of contextual factors influence whether any of us are able to
realize our potential.[6]

Further, "culture"—a typical substitute for "genetics" in discussions
of school outcomes—is also a dubious explanation for "racially stratified
academic hierarchies."[7] As we discussed previously (see Chapter 2), we
find little if any evidence that an oppositional culture on the part of black
students explains these patterns. In fact, if anything, black students are
more pro-school than white students. So what are the "new" racial dynam-
ics generating these "old" patterns? Important to addressing this puzzle
are the general findings in the social science literature of the past several
decades on race relations and racial inequality. That is, social scientists
have documented that the way that race works, and the forms that racial
prejudice or animus takes, have changed. Race does not necessarily matter
less than it did in the past. It just matters *differently*. In studies of racial seg-
regation, scholars find that, while legalized segregation of schooling ended

more than 50 years ago, many schools and districts in the United States remain highly segregated.[8]

While school segregation is still too prevalent, the political challenges associated with it are fundamentally different than in the past because the processes that lead to such segregation are different. No longer the result of formalized and explicit rules, school segregation is now perpetuated through housing segregation, the way that school boundaries are drawn, and parental choices about school enrollment. Building on recent work by scholars such as Karolyn Tyson, Roslyn Mickelson, L'Heureux Lewis-McCoy, and Carla O'Connor and colleagues, we seek to similarly interrogate the school-based mechanisms that contribute to second-generation segregation within schools like Riverview.

To be sure, Riverview High School is not solely responsible for the racialized hierarchies therein. Students arrive at Riverview with some skill differences.[9] Academic differentiation begins in the elementary schools, and some of the school dynamics that can generate academic skill hierarchies begin then. But these skill gaps get exacerbated at the high school level. Moreover, clearly there are class differences among families, and family background matters for school outcomes. Past research, however, shows that black-white achievement gaps are not explained entirely by family background, and that even those resources that black families have do not pay off in the same way in school as they do for white families.[10] Growing evidence shows that something happens in schools to negatively affect black achievement. As O'Connor, Hill, and Robinson put it, "The fact that blacks evidence greater receptivity to school effects but nevertheless lose ground over their schooling careers should prompt us to conclude that it is the failure of schools to 'add value' that places black students at academic risk."[11]

Thus, while acknowledging that schools are only part of the equation, we examine the important role school organizational practices and policies can and do play in contributing to uneven outcomes. In many ways, the fact that course-taking at Riverview is racialized should be no surprise. Research by a number of sociologists of education has consistently documented racialized tracking within supposedly integrated high schools.[12] We build on this past work by exploring further the mechanisms that produce these patterns and how those in the school make sense of them. How does race get embedded in school structures? What role do

racial dynamics play in generating stratified academic hierarchies? How do teachers, staff, and students make sense of race and of the racial hierarchies within which they are embedded, and how does this sense-making shape school personnel's practices? The stakes here are high and reach beyond the school grounds—racialized tracking is only one example of how seemingly "old-fashioned" racial hierarchies persist today, long after the original mechanisms that produced them have disappeared. When we ask what it is about the way that race works that leads Riverview to produce racialized academic hierarchies—how it is that such hierarchies are not a source of daily outrage—we are concerned not only with school dynamics but also with racial dynamics writ large. A better understanding of racial dynamics will help us to better understand schools, and a better understanding of school dynamics can also help us to understand racial dynamics in general.

As we discussed in the Introduction, schools are embedded within a larger structure and culture that sets some of the parameters for what is possible within them, including shaping the nature of interactions and experiences. For example, white and middle-class families who have more resources are able to deploy those to provide advantages for their children within schools (even "integrated" schools), securing them a better overall experience and increasing their access to additional educational resources.[13] This is one way that racial inequality becomes embedded in organizational structures and processes. Similarly, racial ideologies and understandings shape school interactions and practices. For example, we find that Riverview students, teachers, administrators, and parents discuss an environment in which black (and Latina/o) students are seen as less capable than their white peers. We know from abundant past research that race shapes beliefs about intelligence and competence.[14] Research further shows that these kinds of status beliefs about race are a part of interpersonal interactions. We argue that these beliefs emerge from the general perceptions that people hold but also from the way that race and achievement are understood and framed locally.

Moreover, school hierarchies (embodied in tracking) reinforce stereotypes and status beliefs because people conflate tracks with race. Racialized tracks become the kind of positional inequalities that seem to affirm status beliefs. Or, as Lawrence Bobo and colleagues put it, they "provide the kernel of truth needed to basically breathe new life into old stereotypes."[15] Local explanations for differences in achievement often go back to something

wrong culturally with the students (and their families) as opposed to something wrong with the institutions. In this way, tracking strengthens the status beliefs—it is an institutional mechanism through which status beliefs get reinforced. As Karolyn Tyson argues, if ideas about race are linked to achievement in schools, it is school structures like racialized tracking that produce such links.[16] In what follows, we argue that important work in social psychology concerned with the relationship among social structures, institutional practices, and intergroup understandings can provide new insight into how these dynamics unfold in schools and, in particular, help us make sense of the persistence of racialized academic hierarchies in a context like Riverview.

ACKNOWLEDGING AND NOT ACKNOWLEDGING THAT RACE MATTERS

When we spoke to adults at Riverview, we heard over and over again from teachers, staff, and administrators that racial issues remained at the school, but all these personnel also sought to make sure we understood that, as school administrator Ms. McDaniel said, "It's racist . . . it is inadvertent, though." Longtime white Riverview teacher Don Michaels put it this way:

> African American parents are especially aware of the fact that they need to be vigilant and that they need to come over and make sure that their students are being treated right. Because sometimes they aren't, and I hate to say it, but it's still true now. And I'm not saying in a sense that people are purposely doing something because of race, but institutional racism is there. I mean it just is. And I don't think anybody can deny that.

These community members discussed Riverview as a highly racialized educational terrain, but one in which adults operated with good intentions. What does the "inadvertent" or "institutional" racism Ms. McDaniel and Mr. Michaels discuss look like?

We use the terms *institutional* and *everyday* discrimination to describe the dynamics we witnessed because they best characterize the negative impact that even "inadvertent" racism can and does have, and because they highlight the particular ways that race currently works. By *institutional discrimination*, we mean such things as highly racialized school practices

and structures (e.g., tracking) and the way school practices reward the social and cultural resources that students bring to school (e.g., cultural capital, social networks).[17] This kind of discrimination includes "decisions and processes that may not themselves have any explicit racial content but that have the consequence of producing or reinforcing racial disadvantage."[18] As Devah Pager and Heather Shepherd put it, this frame of institutional discrimination "encourages us to consider how opportunities may be allocated on the basis of race in the absence of direct prejudice or willful bias."[19] *Everyday discrimination* includes all the ways that race-based status beliefs and racial stereotypes shape interactions and expectations (often in ways that we are not even aware of)—"the subtle, pervasive discriminatory acts experienced by members of stigmatized groups on a daily basis."[20]

In trying to understand dynamics at Riverview, for the most part we did not find evidence of explicit racism or intentional favoritism. What we found instead was an expressed philosophy to close the achievement gap and an almost universally espoused commitment to equity but in a situation where almost everything about achievement in the schools is racialized—how school community members understand themselves and each other, how they interact with one another, how decisions are made about which students belong in which classes. Both formal and informal school practices and structures (including tracking, school discipline, and the many daily exchanges among students, parents, and school personnel) are in multiple and complex ways shaped by racial dynamics.

Differences abound not only with regard to achievement outcomes but also with regard to the actual organization of classrooms and spaces. Ms. Hicks, the African American counselor quoted at the beginning of the chapter, described the school this way:

> It's really diverse. Unfortunately, I don't think kids really have the opportunity to take advantage of that diversity, because when you look at the basic-level classes, you're going to walk in and 70 percent of those kids are going to be black. When you look at the honors classes, 70 percent of those kids are going to be white. So we have great diversity at this school, but it's like two ships traveling in parallel lines—they don't ever really cross. All the black kids play football; the white kids play soccer . . . If you look at the cheerleading squad, I think there are two white girls on the cheerleading squad. If you look at the volleyball team, it's almost all white. It's like two high schools. The white kids have found their niche, and it's not the same place as the black kids'.

Or as a longtime Riverview teacher put it:

> As much as it seems like we're together, we're integrated, we're not integrated. We're diverse, but we're not integrated. We just go to school here together.

Here two different Riverview staff members describe a context of formal integration and informal segregation, "two ships traveling in parallel lines" that rarely cross. Ironically, in trying to capture the extent of separation, the counselor actually underestimates the extent of the racialization of tracks. White students make up 48 percent of the student population but nearly 90 percent of the advanced placement classes and 80 percent of honors classes (see Figure 4.1). As we will discuss further, these stark realities are obvious to all. For newcomers, the situation can be shocking—how does a community that expresses an explicit commitment to diversity and equity tolerate such patterns? How does the de facto segregation become so taken-for-granted that adults and children can go to school every day without outrage or surprise?

While we are discussing institutional and everyday dynamics analytically as if they are distinct, in practice they overlap. To illustrate both forms and how they intersect, we provide an example from parental involvement at the school. There are clear aggregate racial differences in the resources that black and white and Latina/o Riverview families can draw on. While there are a number of middle-class minority families in the community,
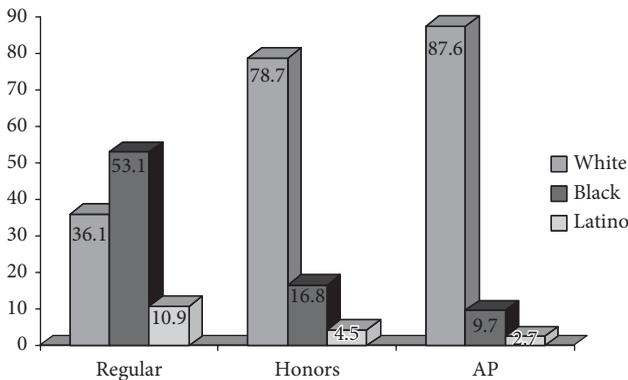
FIGURE 4.1. Percentage of Riverview Students across Tracks in All Subjects by Race

their resources aren't the same as those of white middle-class families, and there are fewer minority middle-class households.[21]

Race, Class, and Symbolic Capital

Riverview is a largely middle-class community with a median household income of nearly $70,000.[22] However, black and Latina/o families earn less than white families on average (see Table 4.1). While whites make up 69 percent of the city's population, they make up more than 93 percent of the residents living in the census tracts containing the top 20 percent of income earners.[23] These patterns highlight the extent to which the community is segregated across race and class lines. One common measure of segregation is the dissimilarity index, which examines how evenly dispersed different racial groups are across a city's neighborhoods (0 indicates complete integration, and 100 equals complete segregation). The Latina/o-white dissimilarity index is 48.6 and the black-white dissimilarity index is 68.1, meaning that in order for the population to be equally distributed across Riverview's neighborhoods, substantial numbers of each racial group would need to be relocated.[24]

Again, as this table makes clear, Riverview is a largely middle-class community. Median family incomes for all groups are above national averages, and poverty rates are well below national averages.[25] However, as is also true nationally, white families, on average, have far more resources

TABLE 4.1. Key Demographic Characteristics of the Riverview Community

	Median family income (2011 dollars)	Family living in owner-occupied housing (%)	Individuals below poverty line in 2010 (%)
White (non-Hispanic or Latino)	$81,000	58	8
Black (non-Hispanic or Latino)	$50,000	44	16
Hispanic or Latino	$46,000	37	19
Asian/Pacific Islander	$46,000	24	23
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder. All numbers are rounded off to prevent easy identification of Riverview.

than do black and Latina/o families. These resources are not merely financial but translate into other advantages, such that white families tend to have more educational resources (computers, books, etc.), more flexibility in time to spend dealing with children's education (either monitoring homework or coming to school to intervene), and more cultural and social resources (ability to advocate successfully for a child in trouble, knowledge about how to provide best chances for college admissions, friends with influence at the school).

However, while it is true that white families have more resources, it is also true that in the daily functioning of the school they do not always have to actively deploy them to gain advantage. As we discussed in the last chapter, race and class often get conflated such that school personnel tend to assume that most white students come from middle- or upper-middle-class families and that most black and Latina/o students do not. These kinds of assumptions often operate at subconscious levels and involve presumptions about more than socioeconomic status, including presumptions about such things as likely family investment in education and student academic trajectory.

We first got a sense of these dynamics talking to Ms. Morgan, an African American teacher in the English Department, one day after a workshop at the school. She stopped one of us and said she had been thinking throughout the discussion about how she tends to worry more, to more closely monitor white students in her class. As she put it, it was not that she cared more about them or wanted them to excel more than her other students (if anything, the opposite was true), but that she "knew" that their parents were likely to be upset if they did not do well. As she put it, she was realizing that much of the time parents did not need to come in or say anything, *just the idea that they might was powerful*. Thus, if a white student was not doing well, she followed up, lest she hear about it from their parents later. In this way school personnel often read and then act on the most available and visible marker: racial phenotype. Skin color becomes a signifier for a host of other indicators, and whiteness becomes symbolic capital for white students. Parallel to the pattern we described with regard to disciplinary issues in the last chapter, as busy Riverview personnel move through their day and make decisions about academic concerns, they are not only responding to actual parental interventions but also often acting in anticipation of likely or imagined probable parental pressure or concern. Like Ms. Morgan, many other Riverview staff

describe themselves acting proactively, often in advance of any immediate parent request. As you'll see further from the examples below, none of the actions taken by school personnel are explicitly racial in nature. And even more important for understanding how institutional discrimination works, the point we are highlighting here is that the resources white families have access to (including whiteness itself) pay off in many subtle ways in large part because of how the school responds to them. That is, not only do we need to pay attention to the fact that white families on aggregate have more resources to deploy, but we also need to attend to how the school's interactional practices, rules, and structures treat whiteness as a symbolic resource and make it possible for racial resources to pay off to the advantage of white students.

Ms. Hicks, a counselor, talked about how this often works:

> It's hard, because I would love to say, "Yes, they're all treated the same." But I think the reality is they're not. The squeaky wheel gets the oil. So if you're a parent, and you come, and you say, "My child got a C. You need to help me figure it out." And I know that you're going to call me every day, I'm going to go to that teacher and say, "You know what? What's going on? Tell me what's happening." After I find out what's happening, I'm going to get back to that parent. I'm going to advocate for that kid. Whereas, if you are a kid and your parents are not going to call me every day or hasn't called me, we have 286 kids on our caseload, it could take me a month to realize that you have two or three C's.

As Ms. Hicks describes, her caseload is such that it is difficult to closely manage, much less keep track of, hundreds of students' needs. However, when parents make requests, or have made them in the past, or if she *recognizes* a parent as one who is likely to call every day, then she becomes an advocate. Above, she discusses both *actual* calls and *likely* calls, both actual and anticipated "squeakiness." Teacher Don Michaels also spoke to this issue of "squeaky wheel" parents:

> It goes back to that issue about which parents are gonna play an active role, and the squeaky wheel and so on. And I know just from conversations with teachers there are some teachers that will simply say "you know this kid really didn't deserve the C- but I knew that if I gave him a D + I was going to get a lot of grief from the parent," and the tradition has tended to be that it's more likely to be a white parent than it's going to be the black parent.

Bill, a member of the school's safety department, talked about similar dynamics with regard to management of school infractions:

> You know, sometimes I see minority students that may be having a problem or get into situations, and sometime the school almost can sense that a parent won't get involved; and the process is kind of slower. When there's a student and they know the parent is gonna get involved, it tends to be a different process and the speed of the assistance kind of (laughs) speeds up.

Bill describes fellow staff "sensing" that a parent will or won't get involved and thus acting accordingly—with more or less perceived pressure to move quickly.

As these examples illustrate, school personnel do tend to describe different aggregate involvement patterns between white and minority families. But they also describe how those experiences generalize to cases where parents do not even get involved because they do not need to. Moreover, what they consistently describe are the ways in which such actual or anticipated parental intervention *pays off* with quite different outcomes for the students. This differential treatment is a matter of school practice and thus policy—even if implicitly so.

Here the performative aspects of organizational routines are highly consequential and in stark contrast to the school's formal or ostensive aspect. As Mr. Webber, one of the associate principals who has been worried about such school practices for some time, put it:

> The school has a responsibility to advocate for those kids who do not have advocates and to also try and prepare those kids who come unprepared . . . We live in a society where not every parent can give the kind of time and attention that we would want to see them give. We certainly can't fault them for it . . . We still have a responsibility for kids to do the best we can for them . . . I mean, that's why equity is so important. A level playing field. To provide the best teachers, to provide the best experiences. Our graduation requirements are not graduation requirements for those who come to us best prepared to do school and with home support. They're graduation requirements for everybody . . . because it's right and because it's good, and I think so much of what we have to do has to come out of that framework.

What these numerous examples from different school community members begin to capture are the many small ways that racial dynamics

contribute to different school outcomes. As part of school structures, policies, practices, and everyday interactions, these dynamics involve not only real, material racial inequalities but also the status beliefs that are a part of daily life.

INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION, SYMBOLIC CAPITAL, AND PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

To help understand the dynamics of institutional and everyday discrimination and how the two types intersect, we turn to some theory from social psychology. This work is useful for framing not only how race became so consequential, but particularly for thinking about these dynamics in places like schools where almost everyone has good intentions, expresses support for diversity, and wants all students to do well.

In recent decades, social psychologists have put extensive energy into trying to understand how social identities and status characteristics like race or gender organize social relations. The first relevant theory comes from the work of Cecilia Ridgeway and her colleagues on *expectation states theory*.[26] In many ways, expectation states theory echoes the notion of symbolic capital that we discussed earlier. Like the abundant work in psychology on implicit bias,[27] expectation states theory suggests that status characteristics like race influence everyday interaction because these characteristics shape "performance expectations." The theory suggests that we read someone's race, gender, or other status characteristic and anticipate whether she will make more or less valuable contributions than others because of her status. Repeated experiments have shown actors consistently defer to those with high status, giving them more chances to participate.[28] The beliefs that fuel performance expectations are based on widely held ideas, like stereotypes, in the culture, associating greater social worthiness and competence with certain categories or status characteristics (e.g., whites). Most of their effects happen outside conscious thought—people are not literally weighing characteristics ("Okay, he is white and male and therefore should get extra time to speak"). Thus, it isn't thoughtful and deliberate privileging, but an implicit and unconscious process. Latina mom Adriana spoke of these kinds of dynamics in our interview with her:

INTERVIEWER: So you think that white, African American, and Latino children are treated the same in Riverview schools?

ADRIANA: I think expectations for kids of color are different.

INTERVIEWER: What do you mean by different?

ADRIANA: I think expectations are less. I think you have to prove yourself. I think you have probably most white kids coming into school, and the assumption is they're going to be a particular kind of kid and they can learn in a particular way. It's a positive assumption. I think that there's not necessarily a positive assumption for most kids of color. And I think those kids have a burden to sort of prove that they can do as well.

As this mother describes, the differences in expectations go both ways, with "positive assumptions" for white kids and a burden for kids of color to "prove that they can do well." Like most parents we interviewed, she was not implying that a vigorously racist staff was deliberately treating kids differently, but rather, that subtle expectation differences lead to quite different contexts of engagement for students.

In fact, *expectations states theory* is a theory of *behavior*, not thought, and thus helps us see how processes can occur broadly and not just among those with strong conscious prejudices—it is not about whether you are individually sexist or racist but about the fact that whites, for example, are generally believed to be more competent than people of color. This assumption makes race a salient status characteristic in mixed settings and therefore impacts performance expectations formed by everyone in the setting, including nonracist whites and confident people of color.[29]

Performance expectations also tend to shape behavior in self-fulfilling ways, as the greater performance expectations are for people, the more chances they get to perform, the more likely they are to speak up, the more likely their contributions are going to be positively evaluated and affirmed. Additionally important for understanding Riverview is that when socially valued rewards like track placement or school awards are distributed unequally, these reward differences can reinforce performance expectations. By creating differential expectations of performance or outcomes, the unequal rewards appear to be "deserved." For example, those in high tracks are thought to be enrolled in them because they are smarter and deserve to be there.

Obviously, how the people involved in interactions behave matters, and when an actor is consistently assertive and engaging in high-status behavior, it can lead others to have different performance expectations. But this works only in limited ways. Low-status groups often report that they have to perform at *higher* levels to be judged as *equally* competent (or as the old saying goes, "work twice as hard to be considered half as good").[30] This is because when a low-status actor performs well, their performance is scrutinized since it is inconsistent with expectations for them. Thus, not only are lower status members given fewer opportunities to participate, but when they do, their performances are evaluated by stricter standards, which makes it more difficult for their performances to be judged competent and harder for them to achieve high status in groups.[31] It is also true, as the earlier quotes illustrate, that when members of high-status groups do not perform well, the fact generates surprise, concern, and the need for possible intervention. The power of these dynamics, sometimes called *expectancy effects*, lies not in the momentary beliefs, brief student-teacher interactions, and single outcomes, but in the "*cumulative consequences of entrenched beliefs about ability over the course of a school career*" (emphasis added).[32]

The many daily exchanges between teachers and students (e.g., the amount of time allotted to answer a question, the kinds of feedback given) communicate to students whether they are expected to succeed. Talking about these dynamics at Riverview, one administrator stated, "I don't care how small it is. You know, from the teacher who says, 'You won't be able to do that.' To the counselor who says, 'Oh, you can't go to college.' There's little things all along that are discouraging." Claude Steele has discussed some of these dynamics as "cues" in his writing on *stereotype threat*.[33]

In Claude Steele and colleagues' research on stereotype threat, they show that the negative stereotypes associated with status identities affect performance for all groups when they are operating in a domain in which the stereotype is relevant (e.g., the elderly with memory tasks, girls with math tests, etc.). To quote Steele, stereotype threat involves the "threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something (e.g., performing badly on a standardized test) that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype."[34] Multiple experimental situations confirmed that when stereotype threat arises, testers perform worse than predicted on standardized tests. The effect for performance is both to dampen black students' outcomes and to lift white students' outcomes.[35]

Importantly, research shows that such effects are not a result of some internalized dynamic that we carry around with us or are predisposed to, but are responsive to the context and contextual "cues" therein (e.g., like racialized tracking) that convey whether the negative stereotype about our group might be at play in a particular place.

These theories, *expectation states theory* (EST) and *stereotype threat*, essentially capture how the cultural beliefs and collective understandings of race (i.e., racial ideology) that we have discussed impact behavior and evaluation at the micro or meso level and reproduce status hierarchies. For example, EST suggests that rather than seeing differential treatment as contradictory or unusual, we should expect to find it in a context like Riverview. EST predicts different performance expectations in classrooms, study groups, and so on, and suggests some of the mechanisms at work that allow racially disparate patterns to emerge.

RACIALIZED TRACKING

In fact, as we saw from Figure 4.1, tracking at the school is highly stratified by race. White students are heavily overrepresented in honors and AP courses, while black and Latina/o students are heavily overrepresented in low-track courses.[36] However, not only is the distribution of students in tracks highly racialized, but the tracks themselves have become racialized. Thus, the local discourse is not just that some kinds of kids tend to be in certain classes but that those classrooms have become racialized spaces.

Julius, an upper-middle-class, high-achieving black student, described the school this way: "The fact is that Riverview is two schools in one. There is the honors white school, and then there's the other school." Similarly, Richard, a high-achieving white student, speculated, "I mean, if you look at the numbers, I'm betting there are more white kids that are in the honors classes, and more black kids that are in minority classes." As these quotes from Riverview juniors show, the tracks themselves have become identified as *belonging* to different racial groups. They are not just high and low tracks but "honors white" and "minority classes." Over time, community members come to generalize the fact that white students are more often in high tracks to those being white tracks, tracks where white students belong and deserve to be. Black and Latina/o students' overrepresentation in basic and remedial classes translates into those being "minority" spaces. These

status hierarchies get translated into performance expectations in multiple ways.[37]

When we spoke to Maurice Webber, he said, with a shake of his head, "I think that sometimes the expectations [for black and Latina/o students] are lower." These expectations get communicated to students in lots of subtle ways. A white teacher described a peer's recent behavior thusly: "There was a teacher who had a minority student come into their honors class, and, you know, he was your stereotypical baggy jeans, big shirt, hat turned sideways, you know, and she said to him, 'You know, I think you belong in my next period, you're too early' and assumed that he was a general student. And he's like, 'No, no my schedule says I belong here.'" Here she describes how, in implicit ways, "black," and particularly the "wrong" performance of blackness (baggy jeans, big shirt, hat turned sideways), signals "not-honors" to adults in the school. The teacher's resulting reaction to question the student's presence in her honors class also signals to him key information about how he is perceived.

Both teachers and students reported these kinds of interactions between race and performance expectations. In his interview, Julius, the high-achieving African American student, reported his struggle with getting into high-track courses:

> My freshman teacher didn't like me. She didn't recommend me for U.S. History AP. My mom had to spend a couple of hours on the phone getting me into the class. Even though I'm a kid who takes extremely hard classes and gets good grades, they just don't let you in. They make it very, very difficult for you to take the classes you want.

Daryl, an African American sophomore, offered, "They [teachers] don't expect much from black males." And many of the staff of color concurred. As Ms. Tyson, a school secretary, put it, "Well, if you are a student of color, could be an African American student or Latino, there are assumptions that you don't care about school, that you . . . you don't have the capability of being successful in school. And so those are negative messages that they have to deal with, ah, every day." One high-achieving black student talked about the strategy she uses to try to preempt low-performance expectations:

> NIA: The first week of that class, I basically let my teacher know how I am. I get to know my teacher. I just prove myself to the teacher the first week. Like I don't even allow him or her to judge me by

my cover. Right away I let them know this is how I am. Like, "I'm not how you think I would be."

INTERVIEWER: So you're, in a sense, sort of preempting that so before they can. . .

NIA: Right. So before. . .

INTERVIEWER: Make a judgment that you. . .

NIA: Yeah. Before they can make any type of judgment of me being a certain way or, you know, because of that in their mind, they want to treat me a certain way. I don't even allow for that to get to that stage. I just right away tell them like, "I do my homework, I work hard, I'm very happy, and this and this and this. You don't have to worry about me."

Nia makes it clear that she does not want teachers to "judge [her] by her cover"; she is deeply familiar with the reality that much of the experimental research on performance expectations documents—that her race or "cover" will lead many to expect less of her—and she strategically communicates to her teachers that no matter what they think about and expect of black students generally, they should expect a lot from her.

It was not only African American students and staff who observed these dynamics. A number of white students reported perceptions among school officials that white students were smarter and better behaved. Gabe, a white junior, reported:

> I'm white, so I'm expected to be smarter. Usually, when someone sees me, they always think I'm smarter than most people . . . I think that usually the perception is . . . that black people are dumber than white people, and Hispanics are not as smart as everyone else . . . So if you have a really smart black person, that's when you see the most, "That's weird." In one of my classes, there's one black kid in the entire class; there's zero Hispanics. It's all just white people. And that's, it's weird.

As he puts it, Riverview community members experience dissonance when exposed to "a really smart black person" because the pairing does not mesh with expectations in a context in which there are large numbers of black students in the school and almost none in advanced classes. The racially stratified academic hierarchy seems to confirm widespread

stereotypes about intelligence and makes seeing a smart black person "weird." Gabe registers the strangeness of the whole situation, however, when he acknowledges that the whiteness of his advanced classes is, in fact, also "weird." Leah, a white student, spoke about these widespread racial stereotypes also, putting it this way:

> I definitely think that there are stereotypes that go along with all races . . . and whites are not excluded . . . So I feel like people see me, I'm like a middle-class white girl. You know, so . . . I feel like people expect . . . me to be a certain way. They expect me to be respectful and quiet and intelligent and stuff like that.

For Leah, being white meant that people held high expectations for her in the classroom *because* she was white. People expect a "middle-class white girl" to be "respectful and intelligent." White students like Leah, particularly girls, reported receiving the benefit of the doubt across school contexts, inside and outside of the classroom.

Students also reported these dynamics in their interactions with other students. Maria, a Latina sophomore, stated, "Well, there's been times where I've been in classes with white kids, and I tried my best at times. When I do, the white girls, they're always going in their own little clique, and look at the Mexicans as if we were dumb or something. It just makes us feel bad." Students reported that their classmates engaged in subtle practices that communicated that they felt that black and Latina/o students were less capable academically. David, a high-achieving black junior, put it this way:

> I just think that kids aren't used to seeing a successful . . . black male student. Whenever I do something that's . . . just like normal. They're like, "Whoa." . . . A lot of times racism is indirect. They won't come out directly and say, "Whoa. You're black. Black males aren't supposed to do that." There's like undertones and stuff that you can kind of pick up.

Other students also suggested that there were ways that classmates made other students feel ostracized. One student, Juanita, a high-achieving Latina junior, discussed how one African American student was treated as an outsider in her ninth-grade biology class:

> When I was a freshman, I was in my biology class . . . there were a couple of us who were Hispanic, and then there was this one African

American girl . . . I, at least, always felt that a bunch of the kids in my class weren't so accepting of her, because it was like she was intruding on "us," our otherwise perfect biology class. I never liked that. . . . It was like, "Why is she in the honors class?" The vibe some people give off.

Experienced as the kind of racial microaggressions discussed in the previous chapter, these exchanges are exactly the kinds of identity threat cues that signal to students that negative racial stereotypes about their group are at play. This echoes previous research by Karolyn Tyson and others that similarly has found that black students in high-track classes experience lots of subtle and not-so-subtle resistance to their presence from white peers.[38]

These kinds of cues can come not only from interpersonal interactions but also from institutional arrangements. Not only do black and Latina/o students feel the brunt of the kinds of interactions Maria, Ms. Tyson, and Daryl describe, but the ever-present fact of racialized tracking links race with achievement in a manner with which they have to contend.[39] Citing an example of racialized tracking's effect, Joan Cristy, a special education teacher at the school, explains how the experience of being in a special education class is qualitatively different for different groups:

MS. CRISTY: If a new kid comes in the class and they're any other . . . race [than black, kids will say], "You don't belong here. This is the black class." . . . And [the new students] hang outside in the hallways until after the bell. And it's not because they're trying to be a jerk and push the limits, it's because they don't want to be identified.

INTERVIEWER: They don't want people to know they're coming in this room?

MS. CRISTY: Um hum (affirmative). And I don't think it's just because of Special Ed, I also think it has to do with race and just, like, see we're all put in a box. And that's because they're not fortunate to be in a lot of classes where they're all mixed. They don't see that just because of the *nature of things*. But they kind of [understand the class as] "it's black and we're dumb." So something has been taught, something has gone to them through their educational experience, which is just so painful. You know? And yet—then on the other side, you know, the Latino kids or the white kids who also are in Special Ed, they have the same thing and it's just

simply because they know they're in different classes. "I'm differ-ent." *They just happen to associate it with their individuality.*

We have added emphasis here to two points. One is Ms. Cristy's com-ment that the fact that these students are never in classes where "they're all mixed" is "because of the nature of things." It is certainly not the *nature of things* but rather the *structure of things*—how classes are orga-nized—that generates these patterns. Moreover, whereas she observes that for black students placement in special education becomes evidence of their collective lack of ability, for other students, as she put it, "they just happen to associate it with their individuality." In the case of the white students, this echoes the general pattern where white students are understood (by others and themselves) as individuals with specific idio-syncratic experiences.

PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS, TRACKING, AND BLACK PARENTS

The patterns reported by students and staff were echoed in our conversa-tions with black parents. For example, many black parents were cognizant of and concerned about low expectations for their children. They talked about these low expectations as a burden they needed to contend with in supporting their children's education. When we asked Barbara about what caused racial differences in school outcomes, she argued:

> I think expectations are jaded. And I think they sometimes judge people by very superficial things. Just because you don't speak the King's English doesn't mean you're not intelligent. Sometimes a child may be speaking a certain kind of way, and they just make assumptions about [how] well they can do or where they belong.

In addition to believing that teachers had low expectations for their chil-dren, some black parents also talked about teachers' lower expectations of *them*. For instance, Pamela argued that among teachers, "the expecta-tion is that a lot of students, mainly students of color, just don't have the parents that care." Parents recognized that these lower expectations had

multiple effects, for instance, making it less likely that their children would get placed in high-level courses and making it more difficult for them to intervene on their children's behalf.

Several black parents discussed advocating to get their children into honors and AP classes. While high school course-placement decisions were made based on a combination of teacher recommendations, students' grades, and test scores, parents could also override the school's decisions. As we discuss in detail in the next chapter, white parents exercised this right frequently and generally experienced very little resistance (and even encouragement) from school staff members. In contrast, many black parents who sought to exercise this same right experienced resistance from school staff. They characterized their communications with the school staff using words like "conflict," "fight," and "resistance." In some ways, this resistance seemed to reinforce the perception of upper-level classrooms as "white" spaces and communicated to parents that staff members doubted their children's ability to handle these rigorous classes.

When Robin's son was in eighth grade, he "was getting B's, almost A's" in algebra, so she contacted his teacher about the possibility of her son enrolling in honors classes in ninth grade at Riverview High School:

> I had a conversation with his eighth-grade math teacher about him being in honors level classes; that was toward the end of the year in the spring. For some reason, the teacher just turned on me after that, after I started asking about him being in honors-level classes. He seemed supportive; but then, a month later, he started failing my son. My son was doing excellent. . . . the eighth-grade math teacher sabotaged him . . . and gave him a D or an F, at the end of the year. . . . so when his papers came to Riverview, the recommendation didn't match. So the math chair called and explained that she thought he should repeat algebra in high school. I had to fight for that. It was a big mess.

While Robin was an active parent and intervened in the course-placement process, she reports that she was not fully aware that parents had the *final say* in their children's course placements. She learned about parents' ability to override the school's decision "after I had been fighting with the high school. After freshman year, I strongly demanded that he be in an honors-level English class." So while parents have the ability to override

placements, this was not communicated to Robin until after her child's freshman year was over.

When we asked another parent, Barbara, about how students were placed in certain classes, she said, "I know that they generally make decisions . . . for honors, you can, a lot of parents don't know this, but you can take honors if you want to. You don't have to be recommended for honors." Even with this knowledge, she discusses conflicts that she has had with teachers over her daughter's placements:

> I had an argument with the teacher when my child was a freshman because she'd taken the exam that they take, the standardized exam. She doesn't do very well on standardized tests. She didn't do very well. I wanted her in the honors track in humanities. The teacher said, "Well, she did this and that on the test." I said, "Yes, but her middle school teachers highly recommended her for the honors humanities track. These are teachers who've known her through the years. You're going to tell me on the basis of one test that she shouldn't be on the humanities honors track?" I said, "Well, if you won't let her in, then I'm going to the principal, because I happen to know that if I think she should go in there, she can go in there." And so she did. She's an excellent student. But, despite the fact that they had strong recommendations from her middle school teachers, they were going to tell me just based on this one entrance test. I was not standing for it. I'm sure a lot of parents would have.

Other parents reported facing similar conflicts with the school. Pamela, who is a teacher in one of Riverview's elementary schools, argued that black students often needed advocates to get them into higher-level classes. While discussing her daughter's placement process when she entered the high school, Pamela talked about getting support from her eighth-grade teacher:

> When my child was in eighth-grade, she was a student at the school that I'm teaching at. Her language arts teacher collected a portfolio of work for all the students. They make placements of the students in their eighth grade year by a test and also teacher recommendation. The teacher recommended that my child be put in a mixed-honors class. . . . But if you have someone that's fighting for you to be put in the mixed-honors classes, then you have the opportunity to move up into mostly honors classes. But you have to get the push to be first in the mixed-honors to be able to have the opportunity to go up to honors.

While Pamela discusses getting support from this teacher, the teacher still had to fight with the high school department chair to get her daughter in the mixed-level language arts class. "I know that the department chair is who her language arts teacher had to go to fight for her to be in the mixed-honors class. She had to go fight with the department chair." She added that African American students face more challenges getting into higher-level classes:

> If you're a high achieving African American student that doesn't do well on tests, you need someone when you're first going into the high school to put in a good word for you, to say, "This student doesn't need to be in these [basic] courses. This student needs to be challenged with the students that are in the honors courses because they're able to do that same kind of work."

In both Barbara and Pamela's cases, they had the support of middle-school teachers and prior academic performance on their side, but a teacher and the department chair resisted placing their children in honors courses. This in a system in which parents are supposed to have the final say and decisions are not supposed to rely on test scores alone. As we discuss in the next chapter, rarely did white parents we interviewed report this level of resistance regarding course enrollment changes. This represents an added burden faced by black parents to get something that is more easily available to white parents.

To be sure, not all black parents reported resistance. Some were able to intervene and gain access to honors classes when their children had originally been placed in regular-level classes. For instance, Davina discussed a smooth process of getting the schools to change her daughter's course placement:

> My daughter, she on her standardized tests . . . she did not do very well. And she was an honors student throughout her time at junior high. And then I had to, I decided that she needs to be placed in certain classes at certain levels, because I know she could do well because she has always done well. So I called the school and asked her to be placed, in certain classes at certain levels, because . . . And she was placed in those classes. And the general classes she was placed in, she was bored in them you know, but the other classes she did fine. She did well. So I was glad that you know at RHS, at least you could call to say you know that. "I know my child did not [do] so well on those standardized tests, but I know she can do better and if she's

placed in these classes at a higher level, I know she will perform." And that was done. And I'm happy I was able to do that.

However, while Davina and a few other black parents experienced smooth placement processes, this was not typical.

While getting into upper-level classes could be a challenge in and of itself, parents were also concerned with racial dynamics in those classes and how their children dealt with racial isolation once they got there. Shana talked about her son's experience in his AP classes when he attended Riverview:

> With the AP classes . . . he took European History AP, there were three African American students and two of them were bi-racial. He was the total African male. And there were three classes offered. There were three European History classes and they had an activity called the salon, where the students had to dress up as 18th-century figures and then present maybe, "I like Beethoven and this is what I did" or whatever, and there were no African American students. And as they move up through the levels at the high school, like in my son's honors English class, there are three African Americans out of 26 kids. In each of the classes he has at the honors level, it may be him and one other child. And that seems to be the norm at the high school.

Shana argued that the racial composition of the classes made her son feel isolated to the extent that he wanted to leave the honors class:

> So last year, my son asked why, if all the other black kids don't have to take the honors classes, why is he required to take them when the work was more vigorous and he could just really take regular classes and be fine and be with the other kids that were African American. And I explained to him about why it's important to take honors classes. How that will help him with his future, and that you can't always worry about what the peers do because there will come a point where the peers will be left behind and you must move forward.

Like Shana, Robin described her son as experiencing these classes as white-dominated spaces in which they were not fully integrated:

> I feel that [he's] a black child in a white world with no help, no support, no leadership, he feels kind of alone. He feels good when he's with his friends, you know, doing whatever the friends do. But then when he goes to his honors classes, he's the minority. That is one of

the biggest problems with Riverview High School. In an honors-level class . . . You're still a minority. You're a minority in the country; now you're a minority in your educational system.

Robin worried about the real educational and psychosocial implications for her child. These experiences had the potential to impact his academic performance and his emotional well-being. As we have discussed previously, racialized tracking can reinforce lower expectations for black students, trigger stereotype threat, and lead to them experience racial microaggressions based on interactions with classmates and teachers as well as the structure of the classes themselves. Despite the many challenges black parents had in getting their kids into upper-level classes and their concerns about their children's experiences once they got there, there were lots of reasons why those who had the knowledge and capital to do so still pursued such classes.

TRACKING'S CONSEQUENCES

Not only does track placement have consequences for *students' sense of self*, track placements also have consequences for the *curricula they receive*, and for their treatment more generally. For example, when Mr. Webber was telling us of his concern about how race shaped expectations, he struggled for a moment to convey exactly what he meant and why he was so worried, but then went on to say:

> I have walked too often into lower-level classes that are predominantly black or Latino . . . and found the activities that are going on, the instructional activity, to be less than or a lower quality than I would find in some other classrooms. It is more likely in a [lower level] that is predominantly black and Latino that if students finish, they will be finished a few minutes before the bell at the end of the period and standing at the door, whereas in the predominantly white honors classrooms, teaching goes up to the bell. You know, bell to bell teaching. It's that kind of thing. It's that kind of thing. The requirement for assignments may be different and the question is, why?

Lower expectations for black and Latina/o students not only means they are more often in lower-level classes but that those classes collectively provide a less rigorous educational experience. Abundant research over

the last 30 years has found that the achievement differences between those in high and low tracks grows over time no matter where students begin in terms of test scores.[40] Those placed in low tracks learn less/show lesser gains over time than similarly situated high-track students. The benefits to high-track students seem to be not the grouping itself, but the enhanced curriculum, special resources, and supports. Everyone, regardless of prior achievement, benefits from the placement.

Like findings elsewhere, evidence from a number of sources at Riverview suggests that lower-track classes offer lower-quality educational opportunities with less experienced teachers and less challenging instruction. African American history teacher Vesta Paul put it this way:

> You give that new teacher three classes of the lowest-achieving students outside of special ed in the school, and you call that setting the students up for success? That's not right. The students that are at the lowest level, at the bottom of the gap, they need the best teachers in school.[41]

We got numerous casual comments from community members about the widely acknowledged fact that the upper-level courses provide a stronger educational experience. White Riverview parent Janet stated, "Well, and everybody told us if she didn't take the honors classes she would be bored silly . . . This is what they say is that the teaching quality is not as good amongst the teachers who don't teach honors." In a slightly different vein, another white parent responded to a question about racial inequities in the school by raising questions about lower-track classes:

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that white, African American, and Hispanic students are treated the same in the Riverview schools?

MARGARET: You know, I don't know. I don't know about kids in sort of the . . . quote, unquote "basic" classes. I don't know how that's perceived. I mean my sense is that, um, it's a different school for those kids, but I don't know if it's the color of their skin or if it's sort of the . . . the track that they're on academically.

Here Margaret indicates that because race and track are so deeply intertwined at Riverview, it is hard to know if the problem with "basic" classes is the "color" of most of the students in them or the "track" itself.

Teachers also reported these patterns. Mike Sellers, a white social studies teacher, put it this way:

> I think there's some structural issues just flat out with . . . tracking. . . . whether people admit it or not, it is a destructive force in some kids' lives. In particular, minority kids . . . Some of these classes that are at the lower level aren't taught at the level which would allow kids to do college work in three years or whatever. So there's a huge thing. What are we doing with our (sighs) our so called "basic-ability" students? Are we, you know, expecting enough of those kids too, so that they can meet the challenges that they're going to get [in college] or whatever? . . . I think there's too much of a disconnect in expectations.

Mr. Sellers bemoans the fact that tracking leaves some students underprepared for the next stage of their academic journey. Mr. Webber raises similar issues:

> Academically, the rigor in the classroom is often determined by the level, which . . . Okay. My belief is that a "regular" class should be as challenging for a "regular" student as an AP class ought to be for an AP student. Being in level two ought to still be college credit . . . because we want everyone to go to college. The way our vision statement runs, our mission statement, even a "remedial" student is college bound. . . . maybe at a different pace, different rate, but still college bound. Every class ought to be challenging, every class ought to force students to learn and to grow. But not every class does. And, yes, it's true. The experience students have is often determined by the track.

As he points out, what often takes place in classrooms (what we might think of as the performative aspects of organizational routines) is in direct conflict with the school's explicit commitment to provide students with a college-preparatory curriculum (the ostensive aspect of organizational routines). The official story, the ostensive aspects of the organizational routines of tracking, still presents it as a race-neutral process with race-neutral consequences. It is purported to objectively place those of different aptitude, skill, and commitment into the appropriate tracks and then to provide those in different tracks with a curriculum that addresses their needs. Institutionally, the ostensive aspect buttresses the imagined fairness of the process. This legitimizes the process of placement and encourages both

those in high and low tracks to feel like they are where they deserve to be even as the actual performance of the tracking routines (both in placement and implementation) is far from race neutral.

Do these track placements just reflect an unfortunate but "real" difference in students' academic potential or commitment? Interestingly, a recent experiment by a relatively new teacher in the school confronted this issue directly. As with all subjects, there are major differences in students' mathematics course taking, which begins early on in their educational careers. During fourth grade, students are tested in mathematics. Based on a combination of those tests and teachers' recommendations, each student is then placed on one of two different "tracks," one that leads to higher-level mathematics in high school (e.g., calculus by twelfth grade) and one that does not. By fifth grade, the vast majority of students placed in the upper-level mathematics sequence are white. By eighth grade, most of these students have taken Algebra I, a critical milestone for students who want to reach high-level mathematics in high school. Historically, by the time students reached the twelfth grade, very few African American and Latina/o students were in upper-level mathematics courses.

After joining Riverview and being surprised about the racial demographics in AP math, Mr. Bettencourt, a white longtime public school teacher, decided to try to remedy this situation by starting a new program. Realizing that most African American and Latina/o students in the high school were never going to have an opportunity to take advanced or AP math courses unless their coursework was accelerated, this teacher issued an invitation to students doing well in Algebra I to spend four hours a day with him for six weeks in the summer to take geometry so they could essentially catch up to those who had been tracked into the accelerated program years before. Over three-quarters of the invited students accepted. Within a few years, he had dramatically increased the number of African American and Latina/o students taking calculus at the high school. While not systematic in its design, this experiment demonstrates that structural arrangements in the school were serving to narrow options for some students—students who are capable of succeeding in advanced courses that they have not historically been channeled into.[42]

As described by those we spoke to, the kinds of institutional processes that lead to tracking include multiple discretionary steps where more subtle

processes are at work (e.g., processes related to teachers' expectations of students). Literature on occupational inequality shows that in places where discretion is possible, discrimination is likely.[43] As Mr. Bettencourt stated with regard to tracking in mathematics:

> You know that in Riverview, probably the impetus behind that isn't racist, but it plays out because of how race plays out in Riverview and dovetails with class and etc., etc., that, you know, not that many of the minority kids are already a year ahead. Some are, an appreciable number are, but percentage wise, not that many.

A great deal of recent research has shown the multitude of ways that racial stereotypes are a part of everyday school life, negatively affecting students of color.[44] In the implementation of programs such as the math-tracking practice in the district, even school personnel with the best intentions might well be hindering minority achievement without doing so deliberately.

Consequences of Racialized Tracking for Racial Attitudes and Understandings

The structure of tracking in schools like Riverview is troubling for a number of reasons, both academic and nonacademic. As we have already indicated, there was lots of evidence at Riverview that tracking conveyed complicated messages to those on the bottom and at the top about race and ability. Ms. McDaniel, a top-level school administrator who was soon to retire, spoke about it this way:

> I think kids just don't realize that they can do things. They just kind of accept that role. You know, it's like, "I'm really not a good athlete, so I don't want to go out and do this in gym." You know, everybody is not Michael Jordan, but you can still contribute to a team ... I don't even know if they really think about it too much anymore ... But I think they just kind of accept it. .... This is kind of a crass statement, [but they must wonder] ... "How did everybody white get to be really smart?" And it's another piece ... chipping away ... that's kind of the little insult. "Why am I not with them? We were always together." So. You know. .... I know that they think about it, but I think another piece of it is we just really don't talk enough about it. You know, *it just happens*.

What Ms. McDaniel captures is the conundrum of institutional discrimination—this kind of chipping away in which there are no clear perpetrators—things *just happen*, but happen in a way that consistently benefits some more than others. Over time, students can come to, as she put it, "accept that role." When we spoke to Elaine Peters, a senior white district administrator, about why there were not more black and Latina/o students in high-level classes, she said:

> Well, one, it's historical. [They think] "I don't belong here." But too, it is recruitment. Yeah, I think in a situation, as much as I can imagine what it would be like to be an African American kid in this high school, I wouldn't see—unless I'm being pushed by home or pushed by a teacher and home to do so, or a group of friends, which is possible—I wouldn't see that as where I needed to end up. But if I'm even an average, strong white student, my kids, my friends are gonna be there. I mean it's gonna kind of sweep me along. So we have to orchestrate the recruitment. You belong here . . .

Here, Ms. Peters describes racialized tracking as a kind of institutional inertia. It conveys not only, "this is the way it is" but "this is the way it should be"—communicating to students where they belong and sweeping them along. As Karolyn Tyson found in her research on North Carolina schools, students internalize institutional messages about who is and who isn't smart, and that information shapes their own sense of which courses they belong in. "Students' deliberations center in large part on their assessments of where they belong: that is, where they believe they will be most comfortable both academically and socially . . . The new laissez-faire system of tracking operates to produce outcomes not unlike the older, more formal system."[45]

Don Michaels discusses what some of the long-term consequences of low institutional and interpersonal expectations can be:

> We have so many kids that are very capable but, for whatever reason, have never been pushed to their limits, and it's really hard when I get them as juniors and [getting choked up] excuse me, I didn't realize this was gonna catch me like that but I haven't thought about it in a long time. It's really hard when you get them as juniors to try to do damage control there, and oftentimes that's just what it is—damage control—because they've lost faith in themselves, they don't trust the system, and it's really hard to get them to realize what they're capable of doing in their lives.

All of three of these school staff describe a process which builds over time, "chipping away," and all express the need for explicit action in opposition to even begin to affect change—direct conversation, orchestrated recruitment, engaged damage control. But as we discuss shortly, such direct action faces a number of barriers.

Importantly, tracking not only conveys multiple messages to students about what they are capable of but also conveys messages about "race" in general. As we will discuss more in the next chapter, several parents spoke to us about how the racialization of tracking shapes students' ideas about race:

> MRS. FOSTER: I have been unpleasantly made aware of how my children speak . . . along racial lines after they're at the high school. I mean they're much more, ah, I don't want to say prejudiced, but you know, [they're] much more willing to group people into groups, which was not the case at the parochial school . . . in comments like, "The basic classes are mostly African American and Hispanic kids" and "All they do is fool around and they're not interested in their education." You know, I mean blanket kind of statements like that which are . . . you know, is that true? Could be . . . I think because race and socioeconomic level is so often linked in the United States that perhaps that's the way they see it.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Do you intervene when they say stuff like that?
>
> MRS. FOSTER: Yeah, but, you know, I don't think I'm making an impression because their experience is different than what I'm telling them.

As Mrs. Fosters implies, abstract sentiments about racial equality often ring hollow in the context of experiential data that suggest otherwise. Jim, a white longtime member of the school safety staff, spoke of tracking and its effects on how students understand each other the minute we asked about "achievement gaps" at the school:

> JIM: I believe that too many white people in this building harbor negative conceptions of the ability, of the intellectual abilities of African American and Latino students. And some of these

perceptions are unconscious. They're low expectations. I believe that tracking is the single most damaging—damaging policy that we could have if we are interested in closing the minority achievement gap.

INTERVIEWER: Why is tracking so bad?

JIM: Tracking reproduces segregation that is at large in society. We are separating—what you wind up with are classes that are thoroughly as segregated by so-called ability as they are, as they would be, if you segregated them by race. And you are teaching children that they are different from each other. You are teaching one group that they are better than another. You're teaching the other group that they are inferior to the other. You're teaching them that they're strangers, that they are not brothers and sisters. You are teaching them that they cannot coexist as brothers and sisters. You are teaching them that they are not members of the same human race.

Jim worries that, as economist William Darity put it recently, the exclusion of black students from high-level courses "makes race-thinking become racist-thinking ... [constructing] an equation between being black and being an inferior student, particularly in white students' minds."[46]

CONCLUSION

In our research, we find that institutional and interpersonal/everyday discrimination are persistent factors in school outcomes. Often "apparently" nonracial and well intentioned, these practices contribute to different school experiences and, we argue, cumulatively translate into different outcomes for black, white, and Latina/o students. It is not just single episodes of discrimination but the accumulation of these in the institutional and interpersonal domains that likely have negative consequences for black and Latina/o students. As Rebecca Blank and her colleagues argue, discriminatory practices accumulate over time, so measures that focus on episodic experiences of discrimination "*may provide very limited information on the effect of dynamic, cumulative discrimination*" (emphasis in original).[47] For example, they argue:

Discrimination in elementary school may negatively affect outcomes in secondary school and diminish opportunities to attend college. Even single instances of discrimination at a key decision point can have long-term cumulative effects. For example, discriminatory behavior in teacher evaluations of racially disadvantaged students in early elementary school may increase the probability of future discrimination in class assignments or tracking in middle school.[48]

The effects of differential performance expectations may seem in each instance to be small (e.g., assumptions that students are in the wrong classroom, resistance to black parent's intervention efforts, lowered expectations for students in regular-level classes), but as previous work on expectancy effects shows, these expectations shape teachers' moment-by-moment interactions with kids—the amount of time they give a child to answer a question, the amount of help they provide with thinking through challenging problems, whether or not they provide specific feedback, and how much approval and encouragement they express. There are a thousand small, almost invisible ways teachers convey to children whether they expect them to succeed and they accumulate over time.[49] As we have seen, these expectations also shape interactions with parents and how teachers respond to them when they raise concerns.

In a comprehensive review of the teacher expectations literature, Ron Ferguson argues that "teachers' perceptions, expectations, and behaviors probably do help sustain, and perhaps even expand, the black-white test score gap. The magnitude of the effect is uncertain, but it may be quite substantial if effects accumulate from kindergarten through high school."[50] As we have argued, however, this discrimination is not just individual but also institutional, including the very structure of tracking and the daily ways that differential performance expectations help produce racialized hierarchies by reinforcing ideas about which groups are intellectually able and which groups are not. It is therefore the combined everyday and institutional discrimination that provides advantages and disadvantages to students. Here we see a complex set of interactions between meaning and structure such that institutional discrimination interacts with already available racial ideologies to both produce and then justify racial patterns in educational outcomes.

Discussing these dynamics in schools, however, remains difficult because often when words such as *discrimination* are used, school

personnel feel defensive. Frank conversations about race are hard, and abundant research shows that those working in schools often avoid confronting such issues directly.[51] The issue, however, is not whether school staff are racist, or any more racist than anyone raised in our society today, but whether school practices equalize or exacerbate racial inequalities. Clearly, schools could be doing a much better job at monitoring how even apparently "nonracial" practices differentially reward children. The problem is not that racial stereotypes and status beliefs are a part of school life—why would we expect them not to be? But if schools want to challenge the many ways that status beliefs, racial stereotypes, and other forms of implicit discrimination penetrate deeply into the classroom, it is important to begin with the fact that they currently do. With color-blind ideologies dominating many school discussions about race, incorporating this truth into the dialogue is especially challenging. As Ridgeway argues in her discussion of performance expectations, while the consequences of status beliefs are inevitable, it is possible to reduce their effects in generating inequality if we acknowledge they exist and attempt to expose the inequitable processes they prime. Similarly, forewarning students about the existence of stereotype threat can help diminish its impact.[52] Current school structures, however, make confronting the performance expectations and stereotype threat even harder because they affirm ideas that need to be challenged. For example, as Lauren Resnick writes regarding the identification of students as gifted and nongifted and the assignment of instructional tasks based on those designations:

> [This] system is a self-sustaining one in which hidden assumptions are continually reinforced by the inevitable results of practices that are based on those assumptions ... Children who have not been taught a demanding, challenging, thinking curriculum do not do well on tests of reasoning or problem solving, confirming our original suspicions that they do not have the talent for that kind of thinking.[53]

Widely held status beliefs persist in part because of the way they get affirmed in these kinds of structural arrangements: "They are supported in people's everyday experience by positional inequalities" between racial groups. The very taken-for-grantedness of cultural beliefs that makes them so powerful in fact depends on daily experience with positional inequalities like racialized tracking to provide the evidence and justification.[54]

With regard to racism, prejudice, and negative racial attitudes, structures like tracking do the important work of generating the circumstances and forms of inequality that sustain particular notions of race.

Therefore, the costs of educational tracking and performance expectations are not limited to the loss of educational potential. They are also found in the ways in which students may come to meet lower expectations and believe that low levels of performance are all they are capable of. Scholars have raised serious questions about tracking for a long time. Jeannie Oakes outlines many of those concerns here:

> Everywhere we turn, we see the likelihood of in-school barriers to upward mobility for capable poor and minority students. The measures of talent seem clearly to work against them, resulting in their disproportionate placement in groups identified as slow. Their achievement seems to be further inhibited by the type of knowledge they are exposed to and the quality of learning opportunities they are afforded. Further, the social and psychological dimensions of classrooms for those at the bottom of the schooling hierarchy impose more constraints on students. [Experiences in low-track classes] appear not only to restrict their chances of learning but also to socialize students in such a way that they are prepared to stay at the bottom levels of institutions, not only as teenagers in schools but in adult life as well.[55]

So it is not just the immediate denial of opportunity that matters, it is the long-term implications of these practices as well. Schools are creating inequality and also reinforcing ideas about who deserves and does not deserve the best educational opportunities.

As with the previous chapter on discipline, one of the troubling findings here is just how much of what transpires at the school seems contrary to what the school and its staff intend. Many at the school and many of those seemingly "in charge" were, in our conversations, cognizant of potential problems and thoughtful about how race mattered. One high-level district assistant superintendent spoke to us as if she had just recently read the latest research on performance expectations and stereotype threat:

> But race does confound the experience of school for kids of color—well at least in part. The way I explain this to faculty is that we live in a racist society, it is more likely that our kids of color grow up in a world where they're hearing messages that they aren't so smart

and that particularly, actually it's by about fifth grade let alone as high school students, they've really given up on this notion of effort and school: Those who would do well in school are the kids who were smart, and those who don't do well in school are the kids who are not so smart. And that combination of believing that it's just about your innate ability, along with a racist society that says this innate ability has not been evenly handed out ... that just permeates the water we drink and the air we breathe and the movies we watch and the TV shows. And so we have to, I think, begin to really unpack that ourselves as adults; first of all be conscious of the way in which that gets into our own heads and allows us to accept less from kids. And then help them begin to understand this kind of oppression that goes on because it is everywhere, even though it's wrong and it's not even accurate.

So why is there not more change afoot at Riverview? How does such inequality continue, largely unchallenged, when so many people see it as a problem and state that they are committed to fixing it? We take this up in the next chapter. In particular, we examine the actions of white parents who, we argue, play a pivotal role in the perpetuation of racial inequalities in Riverview.