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STRUCTURING INEQUALITY AT BERKELEY HIGH

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Interviewer: You said you chose yourself to be in prealgebra instead of algebra. Do you think you made the right decision?

Chantelle: Yeah, because last year I had prealgebra and this year I'm going to take one semester of prealgebra, and then maybe I'll be ready for algebra, but if I'm not, I'm going to take prealgebra again so I really know what I'm doing. Because, see, my brother, when he came [to Berkeley High], he didn't go to prealgebra. He went to prealgebra in middle school, and then he went to algebra here, and he never went to prealgebra here, so he needed to go to prealgebra this year because it's his last year.

Interviewer: You said you had a hard time with math there [private middle school]. So how is it here at Berkeley High?

Jennifer: Much easier. I'm in geometry, and it's like "Oh, okay. I know how to do that." I have a [private] tutor now, and she's planning to be a math teacher at Berkeley High, and the [geometry] books she's like an expert at going through because her school created them. So she's, like, "I understand how they think about this." So she understands the books . . . and she helps me with that. So I'm getting a lot better, and I'm understanding things a lot better now, but it's only because of her.

This chapter focuses on how the structures of Berkeley High School contribute to the reproduction of racial and social class-based inequality at the school. By *structures* we are referring to operations and procedures such as teacher assignment, course selection and placement, and resource allocation, which profoundly influence student experiences at Berkeley High School (BHS). Our examination of school structures also includes a focus on the organization of the school—the decentralized nature of decision making within departments, the distribution of authority and responsibility among administrators, the accountability (or lack thereof) and function of special programs (such as English as a Second Language, Advanced Placement, and Special Education). We examine how these structures shape and influence the academic outcomes of students. As we will show, these seemingly neutral aspects of the school structure that too often are taken for granted play a central role in reproducing patterns of success and failure and, by extension, in reproducing inequality and privilege.

The achievement gap at Berkeley High is, in some sense, a source of puzzlement. How, in a progressive community like Berkeley and in a high school that appears to revel in its commitment to diversity—with its African American Studies Department and freshman ethnic studies requirement—does the structure of the school lend itself to reproducing the racial achievement gap? Perhaps even more puzzling, why has it been so difficult to confront and transform the features embedded in the school structure that are responsible for facilitating success for some and failure for others?

The words above of Chantelle, an African American ninth grader, and Jennifer, a white ninth grader, give some indication of how a single school procedure—ninth-grade math course selection—serves to reproduce inequality, despite the well-meaning efforts of many school staff. As the comments from these two students show, some students have more information and a clearer sense of how the school works (such as the classes they need to take) than others. In addition, more affluent students like Jennifer can rely on the resources of their parents (private tutors and counselors, the

know-how, savvy, and advocacy of their parents), while students like Chantelle who come from poor families have access to fewer resources from home and are more dependent on the school. It is obvious that the backgrounds of students contribute to the unevenness of opportunities for academic success. What is less obvious is the way in which the school structure is also implicated in reinforcing patterns of disadvantage and privilege.

There is relatively little that the school can do to address the inequalities in the backgrounds of students like Jennifer and Chantelle. However, it is possible to address school conditions that contribute to disparities in achievement, such as school size, the student-to-counselor ratio, procedures that are used to track students into higher- and lower-level courses, and processes used to provide academic support to students who are struggling. These aspects of the school structure all contribute to the achievement gap, and unlike the backgrounds of students, they can be easily modified and reformed.

Social scientists have identified significant resources, or forms of capital, that play a role in influencing student academic outcomes. Research has shown that economic capital, that is, the wealth and income of parents, is one of the primary factors influencing student achievement (Coleman and others, 1966; Rothstein, 2004; Farkas, 2004). Student achievement is also influenced by more subtle resources such as social capital—the benefits derived from connections to networks and individuals with power and influence (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001; Noguera, 2003)—and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992)—the tastes, styles, habits, language, behaviors, appearance, and customs that serve as indicators of status and privilege. All three forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—play a role in perpetuating disparate educational experiences and differential access to educational opportunities. However, they do so in interaction with seemingly neutral structures that operate within schools and society.

Chantelle's comments reveal how easily a student who lacks economic, social, and cultural capital can become lost within Berkeley High's large and impersonal bureaucratic structure. She

had freely chosen to take prealgebra for her ninth-grade math class, but her reason for making that decision was problematic: she based it on her brother's experience. Even more disturbing, the consequences of her decision are unclear to her. She mistakenly believed that if she became "ready" for algebra after a semester in prealgebra, she then would be able to switch into algebra in the middle of the year—an option not typically available to students at BHS. Based on her brother's own misguided experience, Chantelle believed that if she did not take prealgebra during her first year, she would have to make it up later. Both of these beliefs were based on erroneous information. That she reached the point of enrolling in prealgebra without having these notions corrected is a reflection of the limitations of the school counseling process. However, that her counselor allowed her to make this decision is likely due to his or her assumption that a student like Chantelle—an African American from a low-income family—should be placed in the lowest-level math class, prealgebra, even though she had taken it already.

Chantelle's experience illustrates why students who lack economic, social, and cultural capital are more vulnerable to the impersonal and ineffective structures at the school. Without an adult to encourage her to take algebra, the gateway to college preparatory math and science courses, or to advise her on where she might seek academic support, Chantelle made a decision that is likely to affect her preparation for college and therefore will have bearing in the long term on her opportunities after high school. By taking prealgebra in the ninth grade, Chantelle is all but ensured that she will be unable to meet the admissions requirements to the UC or California State University (CSU) systems. Given that so much is at stake, it must be recognized that a system of course assignment that allows students to choose which classes to take will invariably work better for some than others.

Jennifer's words are equally revealing. Like many of Berkeley High's more affluent, white ninth graders, she did not attend Berkeley's public school system. In fact, according to school records, some 12 percent of Berkeley High School's class of 2000 attended private

middle schools, and most of these students were white. This constitutes a particular form of white flight and reentry to the public system at the high school level.

Thus, Jennifer came to the high school from a private middle school with a more rigorous academic program. This may be why Jennifer reports that she found Berkeley High "much easier" than her middle school. Although Jennifer admits that she struggled with math in the past, she elects to enroll in a high-level math class: Honors Geometry. Knowing that the geometry class was a bit of a stretch for her, Jennifer's parents relied on their economic capital to hire a private tutor. It turned out that her tutor also had quite a bit of social capital because this particular tutor was planning to become a math teacher at Berkeley High and was familiar with the textbook and ways of thinking used in the geometry class. Having access to such expert assistance was invaluable for Jennifer, who credited the tutor for her success.

The juxtaposition of Chantelle's and Jennifer's experiences reveals that student resources—economic, social, and cultural capital—interact with the structure of the school to perpetuate disparities in student outcomes and experiences. It is important to note that the structuring of inequality at Berkeley High is subtle, hidden behind taken-for-granted understandings of the way things work. There is no evidence of a conspiracy to favor affluent students and hold back poor students of color. However, the structure of the school is implicated in the stark patterns of inequality that are reproduced year after year—structures that appear neutral on the surface but actually reinforce unequal outcomes.

This chapter explores the ways in which school structure serves to reproduce inequality. It begins with Beth C. Rubin, Jean Yonemura Wing, and Pedro A. Noguera examining tracking "Berkeley High style," probing the means through which racial and class-based inequalities are perpetuated through course placement. In the next part, Emma Fuentes and Daniel Liou present a profile of the English Language Learner Program, demonstrating how and why well-intentioned staff have not been enough to help immigrant

students overcome the institutional barriers they face at the school. In the third part, Alicia P. Rodriguez illuminates the ways in which gender is implicated in unequal opportunities, through an examination of the treatment of girls and boys. Finally, Lance T. McCready examines the ways in which students participate in extracurricular activities and shows how their choices reflect and reinforce academic and racial segregation throughout the school.

Tracking Berkeley High Style: Different Pathways to Different Futures

Beth C. Rubin, Jean Yonemura Wing, Pedro A. Noguera

In the broadly disseminated statewide public school rankings released in 2000, Berkeley High School scored a 9 on a scale of 1 to 10, putting it in the top echelon of California public schools. Such a rating suggests that this is an excellent public school, one to which parents should be pleased to send their children. However, a closer look at the academic landscape of this highly ranked school reveals striking disparities in achievement and outcome, which appear tightly linked to race and class.

Tracking on the basis of perceived academic ability is a tradition at many American high schools (Oakes, 1985), but it has changed over the past decades. As awareness has grown about the harmful effects of tracking on some students, there has been a shift away from assigning students to rigid tracks that determine all of their classes throughout high school to a more flexible arrangement in which students can vary in track assignment from class to class (Lucas, 1999). Tracking at Berkeley High blurs the sorting process even further.

At BHS, ninth graders are placed in math classes ranging from Math A to Honors Geometry without any form of assessment. Typically students are allowed to choose which course they want to take in consultation with counselors, who make recommendations based on an examination of their middle school transcripts. As for their foreign language electives, ninth graders can choose to enroll in Kiswahili, French. Spanish, Latin, or German, or in no language

whatsoever. Many make their selection without realizing that the most advanced courses are available only in the traditional European languages. A careful examination of students' course assignments reveals troubling patterns with respect to the ways in which choices about math coincide with science and foreign language course placement. This is tracking Berkeley High style, and it has critical consequences for students.

Ninth Grade: An Uneven Start

The class of 2000 entered Berkeley High in fall 1996 with 764 students. This large cohort provides a starting point in tracing the pathways of students through their four years of high school.

In many ways, all ninth graders start off in the same way. All are assigned to detracked English and history core academic classes, in which small cohorts of freshmen—carefully balanced for race, gender, and achievement level—share the same pair of English and history teachers. Most ninth graders also take the required ethnic studies course, as well as physical education. But a close look at the other course assignments of ninth-grade students reveals how differences related to race, class, and language establish patterns that have profound ramifications for students' subsequent opportunities.

Math as a Gatekeeper

Math placement typically serves a benchmark for ninth-grade academic standing, and the disparities in math placement by race are striking. As is true nationally, white, middle-class, or affluent students at BHS tend to receive access to advanced math courses early, and thus start their high school careers with a major advantage (Moses and Cobb, 2001; Perry, Steele, and Hilliard, 2004).

The Diversity Project's class of 2000 research team found that 83 percent of the ninth graders who were placed in Math A, the low-track prealgebra class, were African American. In contrast, 87 percent of students from that same cohort of ninth graders who were placed in Honors Geometry, the advanced-track math class,

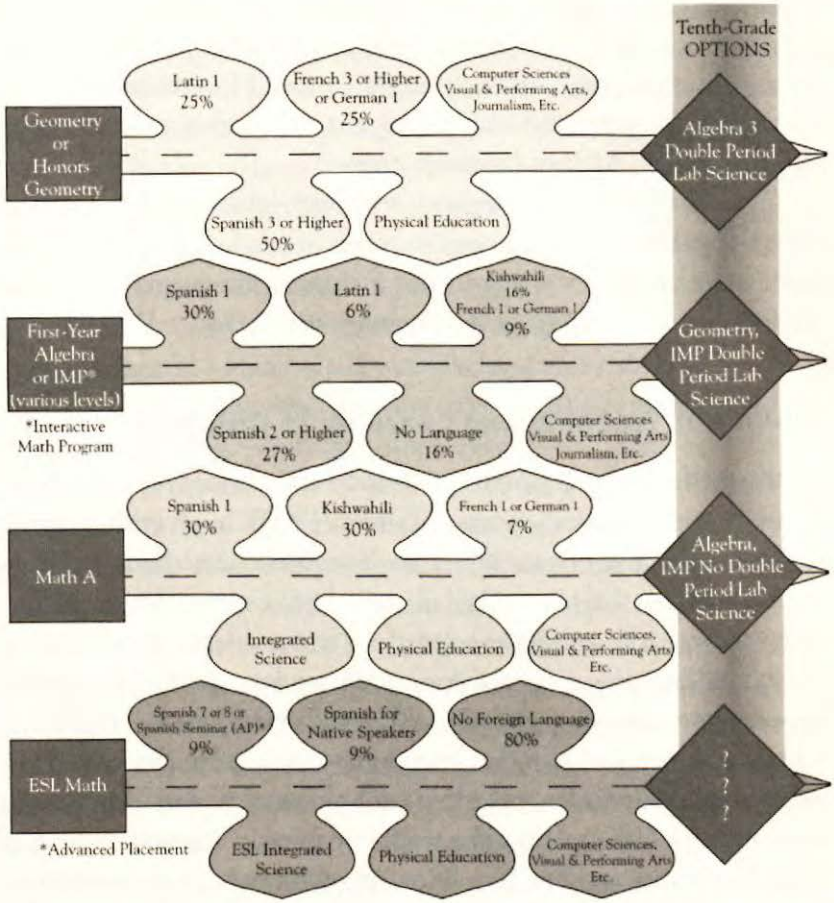
were white. It also turns out that a disproportionate number of these students had attended private school before entering BHS.

Students like Jennifer who came from private feeder schools are at a distinct advantage. Nearly half (46 percent) of freshmen in the class of 2000 who came from private feeder schools were placed in Honors Geometry, compared to just 18 percent of freshmen from Berkeley public middle schools, all of whom took Honors Algebra in the eighth grade. Meanwhile, virtually all students with an undocumented feeder school (students who entered Berkeley High after the semester had already started, mostly from out-of-district cities such as Oakland), who were predominantly African American, were routinely placed in Math A without any assessment of their math abilities.

Math placement at Berkeley High has far-reaching consequences for students' pathways through the Berkeley High course structure. Figure 1.1 illustrates these different pathways by linking ninth-grade math placement with students' course-taking patterns and electives and indicating their corresponding tenth-grade options for math and science.

Students who entered Berkeley High with advanced math standing were also more likely to be placed in advanced foreign language classes. The research team found that 75 percent of ninth graders in "regular" Geometry and Honors Geometry were taking intermediate or advanced-level foreign language classes, with the remaining 25 percent all in Latin 1, a prestigious language typically taken by college-bound students. In contrast, just 27 percent of students enrolled in Algebra I as ninth graders were in intermediate foreign language classes, with 53 percent enrolled in a first-year language course. It is even more disturbing and telling that the remaining 16 percent of Algebra 1 students were enrolled in no language class at all.

FIGURE 1.1 The Pathways Through Berkeley High School: Class of 2000 Course Options by Ninth-Grade Math Placement



The percentages in Figure 1.1 indicate the percentage of class of 2000 ninth graders with a given math placement who also took particular ninth-grade electives.

Source: Graphic by Julia González Luna teacher, and Jean Yonemura Wing; computer artwork by Fredda Cassidy, graphic artist and parent.

Still more striking was the comparison with ninth graders enrolled in Math A, the lowest math level. None were taking intermediate language classes, 67 percent were in first-year language classes, and 33 percent were not taking any language class. In addition, almost half of those taking a foreign language were enrolled in Kiswahili, a language offering no Advanced Placement level. No Geometry students and only 8 percent of Algebra students were enrolled in this African language course.

These links between language and math levels also imply a kind of ranking of foreign languages in terms of academic status for college, with Latin at the top, other European languages next, and Kiswahili at the bottom of the language hierarchy.

Quality of Teaching and Learning in Different Tracks

Ninth-grade students noted qualitative differences between their advanced and "regular" courses (Talbert, 1990). In an ethnographic study in which five diverse ninth-grade students were shadowed from their tracked to their detracked classes, there were noticeable differences in both classroom demographics and academic tone. One of these students, an African American student with high grades named Natay, who was placed in Algebra I and Spanish I in her first year, found both classes to be quite undemanding. Her Spanish class, she told an interviewer, was filled with classmates who "don't really want to learn." "People say the stupidest things," she said. "I look at them sometimes and I'm, like, 'How many times have you taken this class!'" Although Natay focuses her criticisms on her classmates, our observations revealed that the students were most likely responding to the low expectations and mediocrity in teaching found in her "regular" grade-level classes (Perry, Steele and Hilliard, 2004).

Natay found her Algebra I class to be similar to her Spanish I class in its lack of both order and rigor. Her math teacher was impressed by her work and had advised her to try to get into Honors Geometry as a sophomore. An Honors Geometry teacher

commented, however, that students coming from Algebra I rarely succeeded in Honors Geometry, and he discouraged her from enrolling in the course.

It is noteworthy that Natay had taken both Spanish I and Algebra I in eighth grade, a fact that an examination of her transcript readily would have revealed. However, she was not placed in the higher-level courses as a ninth grader, and she did not challenge her counselor and struggle to be placed more appropriately. "It's okay," she said. "Hey, I'm getting A's." By starting high school in introductory courses, however, this academically oriented student was going to be limited in reaching the highest course levels by her senior year. It is equally distressing that in the lower-level courses, she experienced a lower quality of teaching and learning.

For ninth graders, who are new to the high school, these differences were striking. Natay and other case study students noticed the difference in the racial demographics of their low-level classes as compared to their detracked freshman core classes, which were racially mixed. Mike, a white student, declared that he was the only white student in his Math A class. Leticia, an African American student, noted that the only all-black class she ever attended at Berkeley High was not in African American studies but was Math A. When researchers from the Diversity Project asked members of the Student Outreach Committee to document classroom segregation in photographs, the students picked up their disposable cameras and fanned out across the school, snapping photos of predominantly white AP classes and predominantly black and brown math and English "backup" classes, which provide extra time for homework and tutoring. Wells and Serna (1996) argue that this academic segregation across classrooms discourages higher-achieving students of color from electing higher-tracked classes when given the chance, because they do not want to be isolated as "the only one." It is also likely to act as a deterrent to academically struggling white students enrolling in classes designed to provide remediation and support.

Easy to Jump Down, Hard to Jump Up

It is difficult, though not impossible, to "jump track" upward (Harklau, 1994). Very few students try, and even fewer succeed. In general, students found that retreating to a lower math track was easier and far more common than advancing to the honors track, especially for students of color.

Such was the case for Manuel, a middle-class Chicano student who had been placed in Honors Geometry based on his strong middle school math record but who found the class too difficult in the way it was taught. Unlike many other students who were experiencing difficulty in this class, Manuel did not have, and could not afford, a private tutor. He asked his counselor for a transfer to a "regular" geometry class, but he was instead placed in Algebra I, a class he had taken already in middle school and passed with high marks.

Zion, a middle-class African American/Latino student, was an exception who managed to jump track. Zion was good in math yet found himself placed in an algebra backup class in ninth grade, where he joined a classroom filled with other students of color. Whether it was his flatlands address or his dark complexion and urban style, somehow Zion was misperceived as needing extra help. Fortunately for him, within weeks his algebra backup teacher realized that he did not belong in the class, and the following year, his teacher recommended him for Honors Geometry.

Math Placement Opens the Gate to Advanced Placement

Starting math a year above grade level puts all of the Honors Geometry ninth graders on track to take Advanced Placement (AP) Calculus or AP Statistics in their senior year. It also provides an advantage in gaining admission to AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Physics, and Honors Human Anatomy. These AP science classes and other college-preparatory laboratory science classes have math prerequisites, and the AP sciences have entrance exams.

Success in these courses gives students an edge in admission to selective colleges and reinforces the privileges they derive from their access to economic, social, and cultural capital.

Self-Scheduling Camouflages Tracking

Tracking is not the only school structure that supports the success of high-achieving students. Policies such as self-scheduling also do so by perpetuating the myth that students choose their own pathways through high school. The myth of student choice, integral to the culture of personal freedom exercised by students at Berkeley High, further camouflages the effects of tracking.

How does this happen through free choices made by students through self-scheduling? For years, rather than having a standard curriculum for all students or randomly assigning students to teachers, Berkeley High has allowed students to choose their teachers for at least some of their classes. The process is called "self-scheduling" and is done with little or no counselor guidance. Under this system, college-bound students, often under the guidance of their parents, seek out and choose teachers known for interesting and challenging classes. In contrast, poor students from flatland neighborhoods often use the process to choose teachers who are known for being less demanding—teachers who show videos every day and are easy graders. Students who are new to Berkeley High and have no circle of adults or peers to advise them often wind up with the teachers whom few others choose.

Starting with the class of 2000, a computerized self-scheduling system was launched in efforts to alleviate the gross inequities of the old arena scheduling system, under which students went to tables in the gym and pulled class cards for specific teachers and classes. Under the old system, savvy students would converge on teachers who were known to offer popular and demanding courses and take all the class cards before other students had a chance to pick. The computerized system was introduced because it was seen as more fair and impartial. It allowed each student to choose at least one teacher

in a class that the student designated as high priority. However, savvy college-bound students also realized that for a class such as AP Physics or Latin 7, with only one or two sections offered, it would be a waste to use one's priority teacher choice on these classes, which were guaranteed to have quality teachers for the few students eligible to take them. Instead, such students would frequently use their priority pick for their English or history classes, for which two dozen sections were offered, or for their math class, to get the teacher they felt was the best. Through careful course selection and planning, combined with judicious use of the priority teacher and class pick, a student might be able to schedule all or most classes with a teacher of choice.

This system privileges students and parents who have a way of knowing who the "best" teachers are and who know exactly which classes they need to take to enhance their college applications. Moran, McCready, and Okahara (2000), in their paper on institutional reproduction of racial inequality at Berkeley High, state that these students "are able to 'hoard' the best teachers while the neediest students end up with the teachers deemed least effective. . . . To underscore this point, there is currently an email tree among parents listing the preferred teachers and warning parents against other teachers, and this has obvious consequences tied to income and the 'digital divide,' which are both tied to race" (p. 4).

For many students of color, however, "freedom of choice" too often has meant freedom to fail or to barely get by. The high school allows students to pick an "easy" teacher or to "choose" to retake a failed class in summer school and fall further and further behind. As our research showed, these "choices" are made by students who typically lack information and insight regarding how course selection will affect the opportunities available to them after graduation. In addition, students who have grown accustomed to taking classes that do not challenge their minds are unlikely to embrace the opportunity to enroll in more rigorous courses. Unless adults on the BHS staff take deliberate steps to influence students' choices, it is highly unlikely that these patterns will change.

The Upper Grades: Widening the Gap

As students move through the Berkeley High system, they become increasingly stratified and segregated by race and class. The racial achievement gap, as measured by course-taking trajectories and grades, does not level off after the ninth grade but grows wider over time. In part, this is because the largely white, middle-class student population, who entered high school at or above grade level in math, spent their ninth-grade year taking care of graduation requirements and prerequisites for advanced science and math classes, and then they took off in tenth grade along a college-bound track. It is also due in part to a cycle of failure among many students of color, who often end up failing Algebra I or Math A and then repeating it in summer school and tenth grade. With each failure and repetition, these students fall further behind.

By the end of the ninth grade, it is clear that while some students are accelerating forward, others are slipping backward. By senior year, the ninth-grade gap of one or two years in math has become equivalent to as many as five years in math courses taken and passed. For the class of 2000, 19 percent of all seniors were able to enroll in calculus: 68 percent of these students were white, 20 percent were Asian, 3 percent were Latino, and only 5 percent were African American. This meant that one out of three white seniors took calculus, while only two out of one hundred African American seniors did so.

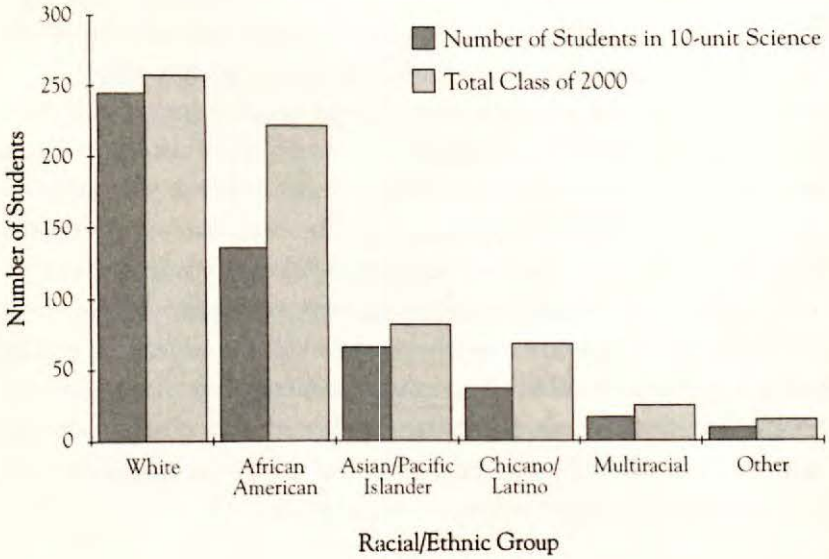
Math is in many ways the most striking example of how students become racially stratified over time, but a similar process occurs in other academic classes that become increasingly more segregated as they approach graduation. This segregation represents more than merely a voluntary social separation of students. As seen in the class of 2000 study, racial segregation in classes began in math and spread year by year to nearly every academic subject area. Add to tracking the effects of self-scheduling and teacher choice, and we find a situation in which students who started ninth grade in racially balanced freshman core classes can go through an entire day without any racial diversity in their classrooms.

Thus, while some students build impressive college resumés, filled with AP courses and high grade point averages (GPAs), others fulfill the minimum graduation requirements that actually fall short of meeting admissions criteria for the state universities. Inadequate counseling, institutional barriers, peer influences, and academic difficulties built over years of inferior education before and during high school are some of the forces responsible for this divide.

Ten-Unit Science Courses

Laboratory sciences are required for admission to the state university systems. At Berkeley High, laboratory science classes are double-period and carry double course credits toward graduation (ten units instead of five). Nearly all white and Asian American students in the class of 2000 took at least one ten-unit science course, while only about half of Latino students and less than 60 percent of African American students did so (Figure 1.2).

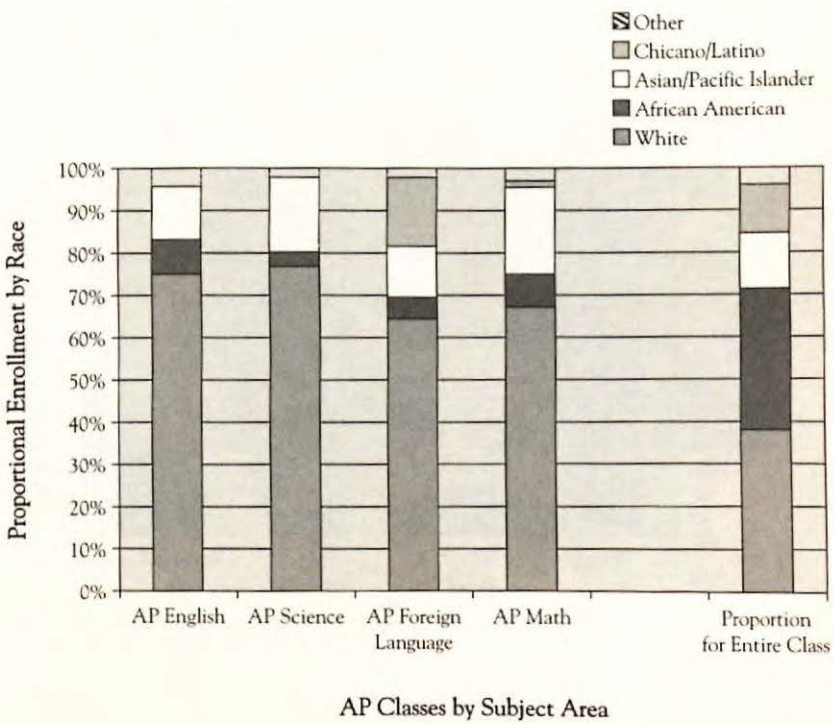
FIGURE 1.2 Ten-Unit Science Courses Taken by Students in the Class of 2000, by Race



Advanced Placement (AP)

Figure 1.3, based on data from the class of 2000 cohort at the time of their graduation, shows that white students predominate in every AP subject area. Asian American students are generally represented proportionately and are slightly overrepresented in math and science. African American and Latino students are greatly underrepresented across subject areas, with the exception of AP Spanish, in which Latino students are slightly overrepresented.

FIGURE 1.3 Proportion of Class of 2000 Students Enrolled in AP Classes, by Subject Area and Race



Grade Point Averages

Grade point averages (GPA), another aspect of student achievement considered in the college admissions process, also reveal distinct racial patterns (Figures 1.4 through 1.6). On a four-point scale, a GPA of 4.0 = A, 3.0 = B, 2.0 = C, 1.0 = D, and 0.0 = F. These patterns start in the ninth grade, and the gap in cumulative GPAs grows wider over time. With the exception of math and foreign language, class of 2000 ninth graders took the same detracked classes in English, world history, and ethnic studies. However, their GPAs at the end of ninth grade, when disaggregated by race, show the beginnings of the achievement gap as measured by grades. Thus, whether they were taking the same heterogeneously grouped classes or more advanced math and foreign language classes, white and Asian American ninth graders significantly outperformed African American and Chicano/Latino ninth graders in terms of overall GPA.

FIGURE 1.4 Class of 2000 Ninth-Grade GPA Above 3.5, by Race

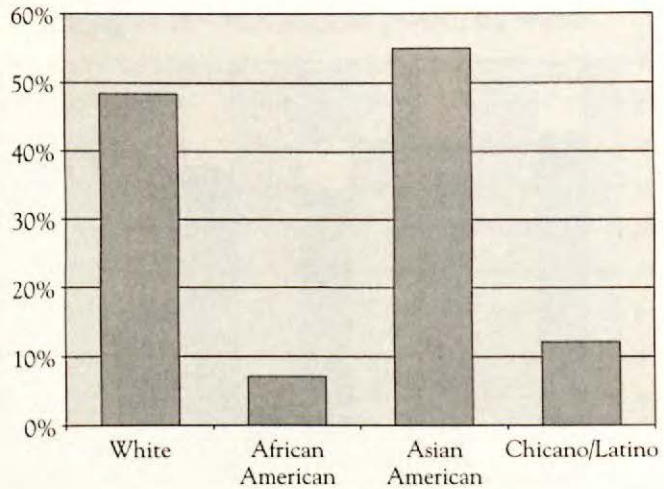


FIGURE 1.5 Class of 2000 Ninth-Grade GPA Below 2.0, by Race

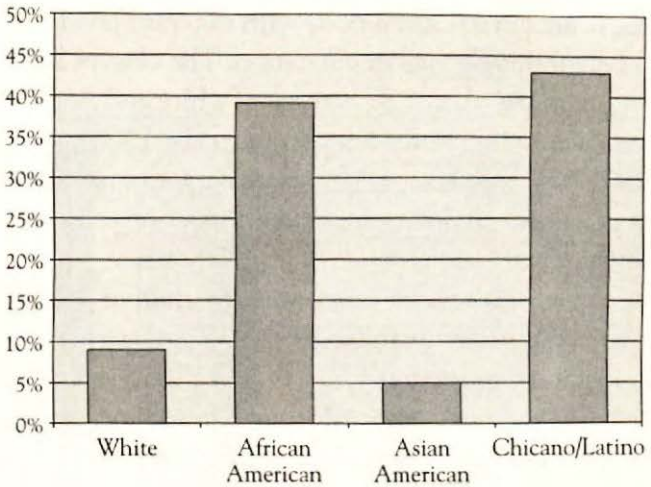
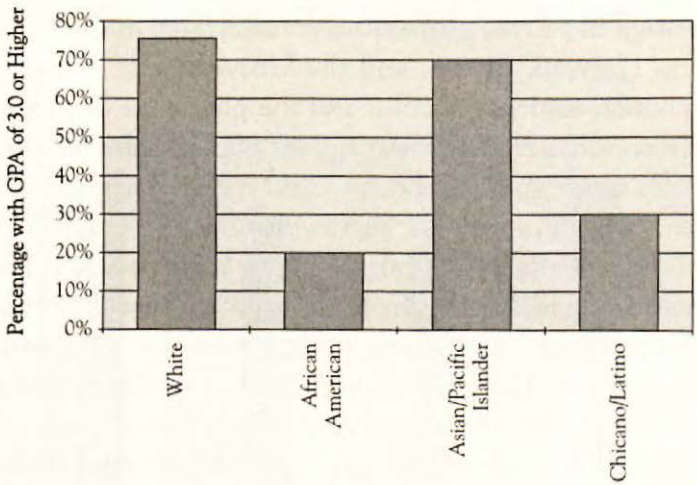


FIGURE 1.6 Percentage of Students in the Class of 2000 with Senior GPA of 3.0 or Higher, by Race



Consequences for the Future: Graduation and Beyond

Tracking results in a student body with different levels of preparedness and eligibility for higher education. The class of 2000 provides a striking example. About 87 percent of white and Asian American graduates were eligible for admission to the UC or CSU system, while only 65.7 percent of African American graduates and 46.3 percent of Latino graduates met eligibility criteria for state university admissions.

The post-high school outcomes for class of 2000 graduates mirror the disparities in their academic pathways through high school, as shown in Figures 1.7, 1.8, and 1.9 (Wing, 2002). In the multitiered system of higher education, middle-class and affluent white students are disproportionately represented in the most selective institutions, whether public or private, just as they were overrepresented in the most advanced high school classes. A mere 5 percent of white students took advantage of the CSU system, whose enrollment draws from the top third of statewide high school graduating classes. Instead, white students tended to choose the more selective of the nine UC campuses or to enroll in prestigious private institutions concentrated in the Northeast, such as Harvard, Brown, and the University of Pennsylvania. Meanwhile, students of color and the poor were disproportionately represented in the lower tiers of public higher education—the community colleges and the CSU system. African American students who chose private institutions enrolled overwhelmingly in the historically black colleges of the South, such as Howard, Morehouse, and Xavier. In high school, these students were underrepresented or entirely absent from the AP classes and sometimes started high school in English or algebra backup classes or Math A. And while community college is often portrayed as a sound, economically viable way for disadvantaged students to transfer to a four-year public university, the actual transfer rates are very low.

FIGURE 1.7 Numbers and Proportions of Class of 2000 Graduates Eligible for UC or CSU Admission, by Race

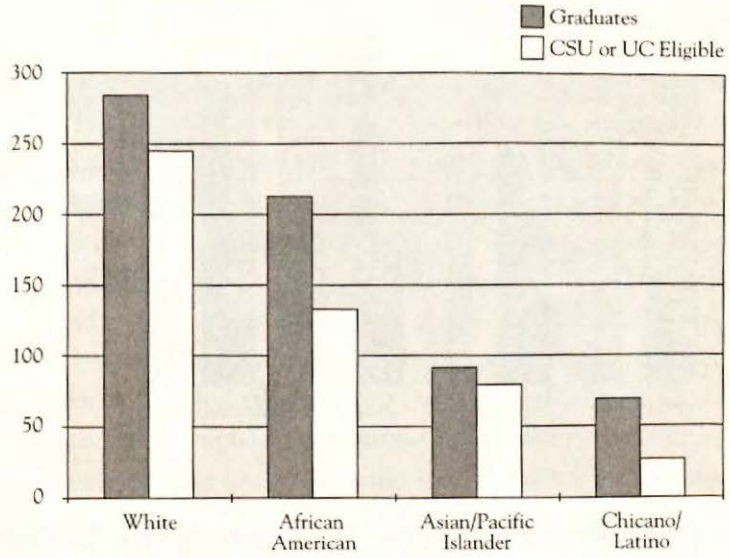


FIGURE 1.8 Class of 2000 College-Going Rates for Racial Groups, by Four-Year College/Any College

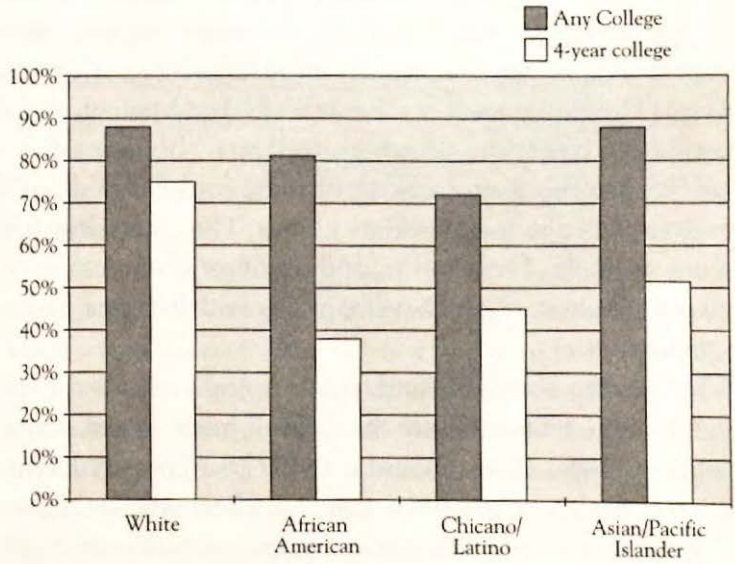
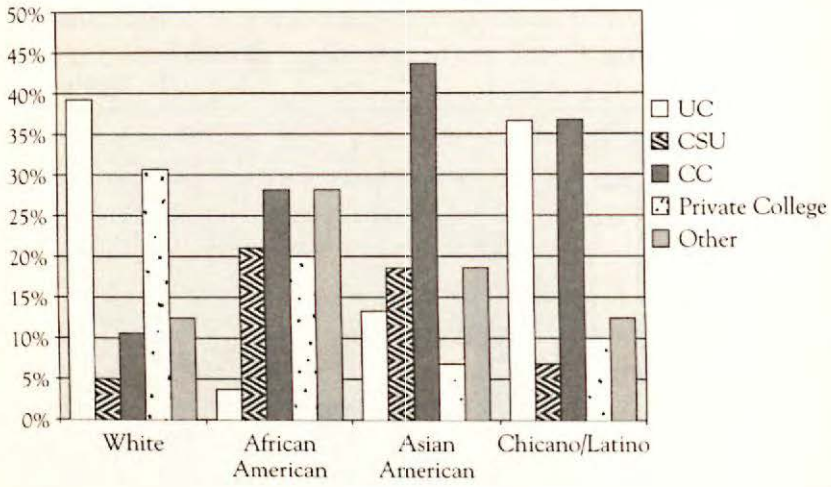


FIGURE 1.9 Class of 2000 College Enrollment Rates for Racial Groups, by Type of College



Why the Paths Diverge: Navigating the System

Complex forces underlie the ways in which the institution structures inequality at Berkeley High. The insufficient number of academic counselors—each with a caseload of 550 to 650 students in a school with a highly specialized and complex course structure—certainly plays a role, particularly for the many students without access to private resources or insider knowledge about the pathway to college. The experiences of Chantelle, Natay, Manuel, and Zion are testimony to the ways in which students who lack advocates and private resources, and who tend to be students of color, find themselves placed in inappropriate classes. The counseling system is just one example of how sorting and stratification structures of the school contribute to the achievement gap and disparate pathways after graduation.

What besides economic and social capital explains the differences in how students navigate the difficult institutional structures of Berkeley High? Pierre Bourdieu (1977) argues that cultural knowledge, status, and distinctions mediate the relationship between economic structures, schooling, and people's lives. Students

at BHS possess different forms of cultural capital, including social skills, norms of behavior, dress, styles of interaction, and language. These vary by race, class, social status, and one's comfort and relationship to individuals with power. For Bourdieu, schools act as institutional agents that reward the cultural capital of the dominant classes and devalue those of the working classes and the poor. In the Berkeley High context, students who possess the cultural capital associated with wealth and power are offered a high-quality education. Such students, who are mainly white and from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds, tend to be perceived as smart, skilled, and highly motivated, and they are generally treated with dignity and respect. This is likely to occur even for white students who cut class, use drugs, and are not doing well academically. In contrast, students of color, who tend to lack the forms of cultural capital that are most highly valued, are generally perceived as less intellectually capable and are less likely to benefit from assumptions about their potential. This form of favoritism is not unique to Berkeley High. As Bourdieu observes, schools in general play a key role in the process of reproducing the social order.

Yet the students themselves also play a role in reproducing privilege and disadvantage. The tracking system is not designed to cheat some students and reward others. It has to be navigated, and students and their parents are the navigators. Throughout their time at BHS, students make choices—about which classes and teachers to take, which clubs to join, and with whom to socialize—that influence this complicated dynamic. In *Jocks and Burnouts* (1989), an ethnographic study of a suburban high school, Penelope Eckert writes:

> There is apparently no end to the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which schools direct children into their parents' niche in society. But the relation between the individual students and the school does not simply develop through one-on-one interactions between children and adults in and out of school; instead it is mediated by an emerging peer culture that develops both in and out of school, *from common experience with adults and adult institutions* [p. 11, emphasis added].

Different subgroups of students tend to adopt different social norms in relationship to their education and their experience in school. These norms reinforce their position within school and influence their treatment by adults inside and outside school. Although there are exceptions, the social landscape at Berkeley High tends to be racially polarized, with students forming social groups among peers of the same racial/ethnic background. Given the racialized split in academic achievement at the school, these peer groups end up playing a powerful role in reinforcing patterns of school performance.

This section has provided an overarching picture of how tracking and other school policies are part of an institutional structure that results in the reproduction of race- and class-linked inequalities. The following case study of the English Language Learner program provides an in-depth look at the institutional barriers faced by immigrant students.

Language, Culture, and Access

Emma Fuentes, Daniel Liou

My First Day in High School

In December 1996 I came to the United States of America.
I went to BHS.
There were different classes, and it was big.
I didn't know anybody there.
I didn't speak English. I saw different teachers.
I saw different classmates.
I didn't understand what the teacher was saying.
I couldn't find my classes and I had no friends in school.
I felt lonely. It was a new school for me.
Berkeley High School is a new school for me.
Everything is new. But I like this school.

Gene Singh, ESL Level 1, 1996