1.

a. I am a half white, half Asian male from a family with a relatively high SES. My mother is a stay at home parent while my father has a corporate job and works outside the house. I’m the second of four children and the first male child, which is a title that comes with benefits, honor and responsibility in Japanese society. In terms of family structure, my family is a very traditional bourgeois family comprising a working dad and a stay at home mom, authoritative in its relationship between parents and children, and loosely based on an age-based hierarchy even among the children. Both my parents have graduated university and have a habit of reading, which meant that the environment I grew up in saw a constant influx of books and newspapers, making reading a central part of my daily routine. My home environment was rich in cultural capital and also taught me much about social relationships by emphasizing obedience and respect for elders. All of these ascriptive factors have, for the most part, worked to my advantage, bringing me countless benefits over the years.

b. One example of track placement in my life occurred in middle school. My middle school did not offer advanced placement courses and did not have a stratified hierarchy of courses within the school, but it did have a grading system with different degrees of requirements per grade which inevitably differentiated students based on aspirations, achievements and academic ability. Far from the traditional, one dimensional grading system that assesses students’ achievements in numerical degrees, the grading system in place at my middle school had different grades that were not linearly aligned in ascending order of excellence but were qualitatively different, each demanding quantitatively and qualitatively different work from students. The grades were “Beginner”, “Developing”, “Meets Standards” and

“Exceeds Standards”. Because the requirements for each grade were so different, the system prompted students to pick a grade they were aiming for and strive to meet the requirements for that grade, effectively stratifying the students and arranging so that each class of students engaged in quantitatively and qualitatively different work. The grade hardest to achieve was “Exceeds Standards”, and although the grading system officially denied any hierarchy between the grades (eg. one grade being superior to another), there was still a hierarchical relationship implied and Exceeds Standards was seen to be the highest grade one could get. In order to get an Exceeds Standards, students had to complete large amounts of difficult assignments, so only the best students in each grade were expected to even aim for it. Teacher expectations played a big role in the process of deciding which grade to aim for, and those who teachers expected the most from were encouraged to strive for an “Exceeds Standards”.

I was one of those encouraged by teachers to work towards an “Exceeds Standards”, and it can be surmised that my ascriptive factors had influenced this encouragement in both direct and indirect ways. My racial profile (being half white) worked as a direct factor in earning me high teacher expectations and encouragement. Students who were encouraged to aim for an “Exceeds Standards” were predominantly white, implying that a student’s race affected teacher expectations for the students’ academic ability, and that white students were generally favored over students of other races. In terms of indirect effects that my ascriptive features had, having high cultural capital and also being accustomed to a very white, American code of conduct made it easy for me to socialize and get along with teachers. This most likely led to a high evaluation of my behavioral skills and general competence, which then influenced teachers’ expectations for me that manifested in their encouragement.

c. Another example of track placement is from high school. Like my middle school, my high school also did not offer advanced placement courses and did not have different tracks based on the proficiency of the students. However, they did have free supplementary courses after class that were usually for remedial education, but given my academic achievements and obvious need of more advanced lessons, they created an enrichment course for me and a few other selected high achievers. What evoked them to create a new advanced course of supplementary lessons were primarily my high grades and academic faculties, which were a result of my high SES and abundant cultural capital manifesting in the form of academic skills. However, it was not just indirectly that my ascriptive factors influenced my track placement. Looking back, I highly doubt that if I had been a woman the teachers would’ve acted the same way and gone through the trouble of creating a new academic track just to accommodate my educational needs. The school did not expect that much from women and never seriously encouraged their female students to strive for academic excellence or work towards admissions to reputable universities. The fact that I was a man most likely served as a direct influence on my track placement.

2. a. The advanced supplementary classes I took strongly influenced my aspirations. The classes carried the message that I was better than most and therefore entitled to more. It gave me confidence in my abilities and made the pursuit of high academic attainment a possible reality. If it were not for these classes, I probably would not have found the confidence to aspire for academic greatness.

b. The classes had no effect on my participation in shadow education. I have always hated shadow education and have never participated in it, and the advanced classes did not change my attitude on that.

c. The advanced classes were very rigorous and demanded much of my time and effort. They forced me to allocate much more of my time and energy on studying, and greatly increased learning time and effort put into academic activities.

d. Taking advanced classes that covered more material with more depth than standard classes enabled me to see subjects in a new light. What used to have no appeal to me based on my limited prior experience with it in standard classes became far more interesting. Among these subjects was mathematics, and I am forever grateful that these courses helped me to develop a fondness for such a dexterous, amazing subject.

e. Placement in an advanced track made it virtually impossible for me to engage in deviant behavior due to a closer relationship and sense of unity with the teachers and more energy dedicated to academic pursuits.

3.

A. One of my friends from middle school moved on to a very low level online high school. From what she told me, I gathered that student SES composition was varied but there was a high concentration of low SES students. The academic level was extremely low with a scholastic curriculum virtually lacking, and the school culture was nonacademic as most students pursued work in the entertainment industry. The hidden curriculum reflected the culture of the school by expecting students to only complete the absolute minimum amount of schoolwork needed to graduate. The school did not even expect the students to show up and participate in classes on commuting days, and teacher expectations for the students’ academic abilities were extremely low.

B. My friend was in a course reserved for students pursuing a career in the entertainment business. In this course, everyone had a side project they were pursuing and many of them had to devote much of their time to that, which meant that they could not spare time for school. The school understood this and didn’t expect students from this course to have a good attendance rate or take academia seriously. In fact, they didn’t really expect anything from the students at all except for them to pay their tuition. The course mainly consisted of low-level students who exhibited “misguided” behavior which seemed to be exacerbated by the school’s indifference towards the students.

C.

f. My friend soon lost all aspirations for academic success after entering her high school and started attaching more value to other activities. She underwent a complete cooling out from the value system found in more orthodox schools and adopted an acrimonious stance against schooling in general.

g. She never went to cram school or participated in any form of shadow education, but her decision to enter the high school that she did eliminated all possibility of her going to cram school.

h. Ever since entering that school her vocabulary has gotten noticeably narrower and she ceased to devote any of her time and effort to studying. She doesn’t even attend class or watch the online classes, which shows she clearly has no intention of learning from this school.

i. As a result of entering her high school, my friend now considers it an impossibility to work a white-collar desk job. Instead, she shows a strong interest in working in the entertainment industry as a musician.

j. Deviated, defiant behavior was part of the school culture in the high school she attended. This affected her behavior and increased what one would call “deviant behavior” in her.

k. As for educational/occupational attainment, she never completed high school and went on to jail for illegal drug use. I fail to see if this was a result of her education or her family environment, but I do think that the behavior of her fellow students in the same course and the school’s indifference and lack of discipline played a part in how she ended up.