

IDENTITY AND THE A.V.I.D. LEARNER:  
PARTICIPATION IN ADVANCEMENT VIA INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION CLASS  
AND PARTICIPANT PERFORMATIVITY

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Acknowledgements reflect the views of the author and are not endorsed by committee members or Oklahoma State University

## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this work to the memory of three French teachers. Monsieur Philippe Gourmet who, in his brief life, changed mine, Madame Élisabeth Sevier, French Resistance spy and Vietnam combat nurse who put me on the path to teach, and Dr. Cathy Stults, without whose support, encouragement and understanding my life as a teacher could never have begun.

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Abstract:

This study investigates the influence of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program on participants who have taken it as an elective course for at least one year in high school and who have gone on to complete at least two years of higher education. Participants describe their experiences in terms of the way they saw/see themselves as learners, as students and as members of communities. Using a narrative inquiry approach to analysis and a poststructuralist theoretical framework influenced by Judith Butler's work in the field of gender identity, participants' experiences are examined with an eye toward the ways in which their AVID participation had a role in the way they perform their identity and how they see themselves as acting and reacting in the performative aspects of their home selves, high school selves and college selves. In examining the narratives of participant experiences, particular attention is paid to the ways in which they mold their views of themselves and others' views of them into a set of values that, in their telling, sets them apart from who they had been and from others similarly situated who did not have the AVID experience (the high school self). It also sets them apart from their families (the home self), whose lack of knowledge and understanding of the process of becoming first-generation college students inhibited their ability to understand and effectively advocate for their children. It did, however, connect them to the kinds of cultural capital that would improve their ability to perform as higher education expects of undergraduates (the college self).

The findings of this research center on the interplay between internal agency and external influence as they combine to create participants' views of their own identities and can be seen through their attitudes and actions as they pursued undergraduate degrees. An implication of this work is the idea that AVID serves as a bridge of sorts which connects the agent desiring to be with the society which expects it to be.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Having or bearing ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ is an enormously powerful prerogative within the social world, one way that power dissimulates as ontology.”

— Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (2004) (p. 27)

“Cognition is the most socially-conditioned activity of man, and knowledge is the paramount social creation.”

— Ludwig Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (1979) (p. 96)

#### **Introduction**

Power, agency, and identity are concepts which have fascinated humankind since its earliest recorded history. The attempt to gain, hold, and exercise power and to assert ourselves as individuals can be traced back to our earliest days as a species. Power, agency, and identity are as complex as they are enduring. Thinkers have devoted their lives to the pursuit of understanding these entities only to have their ideas eclipsed by the ever-evolving context in which they are studied. Thinking about who we are, what we can do, and why we do it has undergone countless changes since the dawn of philosophy and in all likelihood, our perspectives will continue to evolve.

As we participate in this process, we may stop to wonder what, precisely, it is that motivates and influences it. How many identities do we have? How and why does the way in which we build our identities and perceive those of others change? Why does it take a particular direction? What is considered of value and why? While we may spend much of our time

focused on the future, in the context of an enduring yet constantly changing search, we find it useful to look into the ways in which students, teachers, and other education stakeholders identify themselves, their actions, and their reasons for those actions. How we determine who we are, what we do, why we do it, and how we analyze the impact of those determinations may allow us to go forward with an evolved understanding of the practices with which we attempt to make learning more impactful and to enable those involved in the work of teaching and learning to optimize their efforts.

This research seeks to examine the ways in which students who took part in an additive elective college preparatory program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) have experienced the high school-matriculation-university study path. I have no experience teaching an AVID elective course or in any other way administering the program. My familiarity with AVID comes from acquaintance with AVID students and with other teachers, administrators, counselors and other adults who have taught or otherwise worked with students in the program. By studying AVID participants, it is hoped that a variety of experiences will emerge, lending insight into the experience of both privileged and at-opportunity youth. This variety is of particular interest to me as a scholar in part because of my own background.

Historically, my ancestors would have been considered very much at-opportunity. My mother's white, agrarian family would have been considered moderately prosperous but she was a something of an outcast, having moved to Oklahoma from Indiana and married an Indian. As a result, the only family I ever knew was my father's family, a group of Choctaw and Creek Indians from southeast Oklahoma. In the 1830's, his ancestors were relocated from their traditional homelands in Mississippi and Alabama to a new home centered in the southern half of what was then known as Indian Territory. They left their land holdings, farming equipment and

livestock behind and made the arduous journey known as the Trail of Tears to begin again in an unfamiliar place. At the behest of the United States government, they became landowners and farmers. They sent their children to government- and church-administered so-called Indian schools (Lomawaima, 1995) to learn to be Christian farmers, nurses, teachers, and tradespeople in the manner of European Americans.

As with other resettlement and assimilation programs, that experienced by the putative five civilized tribes did not go always go entirely to plan and when it did, it had certain unexplored consequences. Being non-whites in the South, Native people were not accorded a status equivalent to that of whites. They were excluded from some aspects of society and commerce and disadvantaged in others even when they did all they could to get along. As a result, a general economic malaise was experienced among the Native population of Oklahoma and a general sense of limited opportunity made itself felt in my father's extended family (J. Baker, personal communication). Partly owing to the marginal (Spivak, 1988) status of his people, my father found himself born into a family ill at ease with the conventions of the white world and not particularly motivated to gain entrée thereto.

Despite being born into a family more focused on the past than the future, my father was born at a propitious time in History. The year of his birth, 1937, saw an era of tension in Europe and the Far East coming to a head and a new era of technology coming to fruition. By the time he was eight and a half years old, the allies had defeated the axis powers and a new age of mass migration and mass communication was dawning. From the vantage of his grandparents' subsistence farm, Man, as my father was called by his family, could see that his future lay not in preserving the traditions of his relations but in taking all comers in the rapidly expanding postwar economy. He may not have known all the dimensions of the world he wanted to enter

but he knew that being poor and confined to the small community where he was raised would not do for him.

This knowledge did not improve his relationship with his grandparents, who were raising him. His constant back talk and misbehavior, inspired in part by what he witnessed in school with the more affluent children from town and what he heard on the radio programs of the day, made his grandparents ever more amenable to the idea of sending him to a boarding school in Muskogee, Oklahoma called Bacone Indian School.

Run by missionaries of the American Baptist Church and subsidized by tuition, donations from churchgoers and government grants, Bacone sought to do the same job as many other Indian schools. Viewed generously, they wanted to teach Native boys and girls to become self-sufficient, productive members of European-American style society. The reservations were a generation in the past for the Indians of Oklahoma and Natives had been made American citizens fairly recently. The schools' logic was that they deserved to be taught how to fit in. Seen from a modern perspective, this could be considered an act of cultural aggression but in the context of the times, Man, as my father was called, was only too happy to take part in this instruction.

He learned, as AVID students today are taught, how to work within the existing system of privilege (Johnson, 2005, 2006). Potential areas of difference might be found surrounding the approach his long-ago mentors took to his home culture and the approach AVID takes to its students' home cultures and the perspective different students bring to their experience. There might also be a difference between what Bacone thought its charges capable of and what AVID seeks to inspire its students to do. My father has long been adamant that the lifestyle of his grandparents and their grandparents held no appeal for him but it is perhaps worth wondering

how things might have been different had the Native culture in that time and place been given greater validity.

For my own part, by the time I came along, my father's identity had been through multiple iterations and he had settled into a lifestyle that could be seen as typical of a white, middle class sales executive working for a Fortune 100 corporation. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, we lived in modern homes in affluent suburbs or small cities and enjoyed relative financial and emotional stability. My brother and I came to see ourselves as white only, doing very little to reconcile ourselves to our family history. For us, as for our father, the future was the question, not the past. When, during the summer of 1991, I spent three months attending courses at Colorado School of Mines with fifteen other Native or biracial students, of whom thirteen had grown up on reservations, I was shocked to find myself identifying more with the marginal Native and in opposition to the more "center" white identity I had formed up to that point (Spivak, 1988). This tension only grew during the following semester, when the racist attitudes of my contemporaries (and myself) came into conflict with what I now understand to have been a nascent critical consciousness.

As time went on and I continued to interact with both the center and the margins of the power dynamic, I concluded that a major part of the narrative of who I was did not make sense. If I were being honest, how could I square my racist and classist attitudes with what I understood to be true about the people against whom they were directed? From that day to this, the incompatibility of a "democratic, tolerant teaching" (Literacy dot org, 2009) with reductive and exclusionary views became a central part of my pedagogical practice. It was not enough merely to reject those attitudes. It became necessary to understand them; to study what they did in the world. This imperative, then, leads to the relevance of poststructuralist theories, in particular

Judith Butler's theory of performativity which, while most often used to describe the production of gender roles; serves equally well in my view to explore other aspects of human identity, specifically the power/not power spectrum.

### **Research Basis**

Given the complexity and durability of matters of power and identity and the way in which they have been woven throughout the human experience, the research question asks how do students who participated in a particular program intended to bolster their identities as learners in an academic context, in this case known as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), perceive their experience in the program as having helped, not helped, or otherwise influenced their experience during their first two years of postsecondary study?

One way in which this might be accomplished is to make an inquiry into the perspectives of some of those who have received explicit instruction in the ways of college study and used the knowledge gained thereby to progress through the levels of the American education system. A gap exists in the scholarly literature with regard to performative analysis of power among students preparing to engage in and engaging in higher learning in the United States. Starting with an understanding of one program intended to help secondary students in grades six through twelve in this process and using Judith Butler's views on how aspects of the identity are influenced and constituted as performatives, some understanding may be found of the ways in which such instruction coupled with other forms of support such as group and individual tutoring, mentoring, and advising might influence those who have participated in both the instruction and the navigation of the college experience.

This research explores the experiences of a group of young adults who participated in a program known as Advancement Via Individual Determination (commonly called AVID by

those familiar with the program) who have gone on to at least two years of college or university study. Using interviews with the program's alumni, a data set has been assembled which allows for an analysis through a poststructuralist theoretical lens to provide insight into the ways students construct their identities as participants in higher education. Of particular interest are the ways in which AVID participants perceive the program to have influenced the ways in which they perform their identity/ies as postsecondary students. The goal of this study is to gain insight into the ways in which the AVID experience interacts with college students' agency and the pressures present in the societal space they inhabit as they go about performing their identities in conscious and unconscious ways.

### **Research Question**

The question I investigated through the current research is as follows: How do college students who have completed two years of post-secondary education perceive AVID to have influenced the way they perform their identities as learners and as members of their cultural group?

### **Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)**

This research is salient for two reasons. First, it investigates one of the largest and oldest school interventions in place in the United States (Radding, 2010). Second, it examines the nature of identity creation and its effects on the ways in which people learn to wield power, that is to say the ways in which they move within a context in order to gain satisfaction in the form of academic and career advancement.

In order to address the first objective, it is worth describing the AVID program. AVID began in Santa Monica, California in 1980. At that time, local schools were being desegregated by court order. Mary Catherine Swanson was head of the English department at Clairemont

High School in the Santa Monica Unified School District (Swanson, Marcus & Elliot, 2000). She and her colleagues were accustomed to working with a “homogenous middle class student population, 80% of whom enrolled in college” (Swanson et al., 2000). For the 1980-1981 school year, a new high school was opened and a new bussing system was put in place to implement court-ordered integration. These two factors combined to siphon off many of Clairemont’s higher socioeconomic status students while replacing them with approximately 500 students from lower socioeconomic Latino and African-American communities. Anticipating changing needs among her incoming students, Swanson worked with her principal and with the outreach department at The University of California at San Diego to conduct an elective class during which Swanson taught writing skills and students from the university tutored high school students in study skills and motivation. By insisting on copious note taking, learning to pursue learning through inquiry, and expressing oneself in academically oriented English, Swanson et al. (2000) relates that she taught these students first how to perform an academic identity and next to inhabit and develop it.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this post-structuralist theoretical study of the experiences of students who participated in AVID and completed at least two years of college is to examine the change or lack of change in how they performed their identities during the matriculation process and their first two years of college. I investigated how and whether what AVID is doing does what its proponents and implementers believe it is doing. It may be that AVID is changing the lives it impacts by teaching students to think of themselves as college bound or it may be that the statistics compiled by AVID are skewed and the impact is less meaningful than the numbers

would suggest. I also wish to describe in depth the ways in which AVID alumni are taking the lessons and experiences in AVID class and translating it to the higher education context.

### **Research Problem**

From August, 2012 to May, 2014, I was employed as a French teacher in a highly diverse school located in the Richardson Independent School District. This district is located largely in the inner Dallas suburb of Richardson, Texas but fingers of the district reach south into Dallas proper. It was in Richardson's southernmost high school, Lake Highlands, where I first became acquainted with AVID.

I noticed that unlike the more suburban schools where I had worked in Oklahoma, the walls of Lake Highlands High School were decorated with posters depicting universities throughout the United States. Each college-educated adult in the building, teachers, administrators, librarians, the school nurse, even the Dallas Police Department school resource officers, had a small poster outside their classroom or office doors bearing their academic credentials and their alma mater. Faculty and staff were encouraged to wear those universities' colors on so-called 'jeans days' and to talk openly with students about their academic experiences. This piqued my curiosity as I had never before seen such a concerted effort to make students aware of the adults in their school lives as scholars. I asked an assistant principal and was told that this was part the school's effort to develop a college-going mindset among the student body. Such an effort was not simply a feel-good gesture. It was a concerted part of the school's attempt to create a pervasive culture that would comport with the requirements of the AVID program, which was in place throughout the district. Considering that approximately one third of the school's students came from economically affluent homes of primarily European-

and Asian-American extraction and the other two thirds were divided fairly evenly between Black and Latinx ethnicities of less affluence, I was struck by the idea that the entire school, not just a portion of it dedicated to the needs of its less-affluent and traditionally at-opportunity populations, made this culture a priority. As I watched the program in action and spoke with students enrolled in it, I became curious as to how those students' identities were influenced by the classes they took, the interactions they experienced, and the intended and unintended lessons they carried away.

As a result of my time in Richardson and my curiosity about the AVID program, I got to know several students and adults involved in planning, teaching, taking, and evaluating AVID. They were the people who were creating that school climate and who were hoping to benefit from it both personally and professionally. I relied initially on those acquaintances either to serve as participants or to help refer me to potential participants but as events played out, one Facebook friend who is a former in-law of mine proved to be the key. He introduced me online to a school administrator of his acquaintance who, in turn, introduced me to a network of AVID teachers and alumni in North Texas. The matter of referrals figured significantly in the recruitment of participants for this research as adults contacted their network of alumni and those alumni put me in touch with other alumni and teachers beyond that scope of influence.

Significant resources are being put into implementing the AVID program in middle schools and high schools in a large number of schools, primarily in California and the Midwest, but in locations all over the country and overseas (AVID, 2016). From a poststructuralist viewpoint, it is worthwhile to examine, by speaking to those involved, what they feel AVID has or has not done for them as students and whether it was additive or subtractive to their

experience as members of their respective cultures. Does AVID know what what they do does? Do AVID participants? (Foucault, 2006).

Given the \$5,000,000,000 in budget cuts enacted by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Texas Legislature (Barta, 2011), of which \$4,000,000,000 affected primary and secondary education, it seems a worthwhile exercise to examine a program that requires districts to hire significant staff and pay for significant staff development for its implementation.

This research seeks to examine identity formation through a post-structuralist theoretical lens. According to one view of poststructuralist theories (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 2004, 2015a, 2015b), each of us forms her or his identity based on innumerable factors, only some of which are known to us. We also operate within a system of unearned privilege which both acts upon and is acted upon by our identity performance (Johnson, 2006). The ways in which students who have not had some of the institutional advantages enjoyed by others, i.e. whiteness, heterosexuality, a Christian identity, a cisgender identity, a childhood minimally troubled by stressors such as financial instability, substance abuse, physical, mental and sexual abuse, and role models of educational achievement (Johnson, 2005) have interacted with the AVID program and how they perceive it to have influenced the way they interacted with the community college and university system seem to fit within the guidelines established by the performative notion of identity.

I have examined the reported experiences of five adult students who spent one year or more in an AVID program during their secondary school years and who have completed at least two years in a community college or university setting. According to the information AVID collects on its participants (AVID, 2013h), I predicted that these students would likely be of African or African-American and Latinx heritage and come from a low-income home. Some

were immigrants to the United States or the children of immigrants. Given the demographics cited by AVID, this is largely representative of the community they serve (AVID, 2013d).

### **AVID in Context**

As a result of my observations as a teacher in schools with AVID programs and conversations with administrators, teachers and students who have taken part in them (B. Wing, personal communication, April 19, 2018, A. Campbell, personal communication, May 25, 2017, A. Contreras, personal communication, November 10, 2017, E. Galdamez, personal communication, November 10, 2017), I have developed some insight into how the program exists, at least in some of its iterations. As will be described in greater detail in the review of relevant literature, AVID Center, its corporate headquarters, insists on a high degree of fidelity in the way its programs are carried out in the schools that offer it. They require specific training for personnel but they also expect AVID's tenets to be interwoven into the culture of the school and the district to which it belongs. It is not sufficient, from their point of view, to offer an elective called AVID that students can take if they wish. For one thing, students do not simply enroll in AVID. They are selected by the AVID teacher with input from counselors and administrators, interviewed and accepted before they are enrolled. Further, AVID teachers implement programs that raise awareness of the tenets and results of the program. In the schools where I have taught that have AVID programs, the walls are bedecked with inspirational posters and handbills generated by AVID students to express the beliefs they are taught in the class. College posters and pennants decorate the hallways and the previous year's college acceptance letters are blown up to poster size and posted outside the AVID teacher's classroom where they hang until the current year's crop of seniors begin to receive their acceptance letters. Binders of scholarship award letters are kept, as are running totals of the amount earned by AVID students. All of this

combines to create a culture within the AVID class of building toward postsecondary study and is intended to foster an awareness of AVID's intent and objectives schoolwide, although the extent to which this occurs, as the data provided by participants suggests, is limited.

Having been recruited, interviewed and accepted into the AVID program, new enrollees are met with the program's requirements. Each of the participants in the current research reported that their AVID teachers enforced certain practices that are considered a requirement by AVID Center and district AVID personnel. First, each student possesses a binder, in which she is required to keep notebook paper, Cornell note forms, a pencil pouch containing number two pencils, blue or black pens, and highlighters as well as maintaining course syllabi, notes and class work behind labeled dividers. They are also required to have a bag or backpack of some type (presumably in schools allowing such accessories) in which they keep their binders and other school accoutrements in good order. Having taught at a school seeking AVID's National Demonstration School designation, I have been responsible for helping to enforce these requirements and can report that they are both specific and mandatory for AVID students.

In addition to weekly binder and backpack checks to promote compliance, participants Michael, Tien and Isabel all spoke in some detail about the tutorial request form and the process surrounding resolving student issues with curriculum as a way of providing the rigor with support espoused by AVID Center. AVID students are required to turn in a form on which they detail a difficulty they are having in a course they are taking along with steps they have taken to address the issue. When tutors hired by the school from local universities arrive to provide assistance, they look over the request and propose it to a tutorial group including the questioner and approximately five of his student colleagues. It is the group's task, along with the tutor, to help the questioner resolve the issue. This is, as reported by the participants, not something that

came to them naturally but which they came to appreciate as an approach to problem-solving. These practices are illustrative of the sort of change AVID seeks to affect in its enrollees. By establishing non-negotiable practices and enforcing a spirit of collaboration and comradely competition, the data gathered in this research suggest that AVID influences the ways its students who persist in college, to the two-year mark at any rate, by teaching them a skill set that is consistent with undergraduate study and which they first adopt and then adapt to their own purposes as young adult learners.

In its published materials (AVID, 2013k) and in the writings of its founder (Swanson, 1989, Swanson et al., 1995, Swanson et al., 2000), AVID promotes the goal of improving student achievement in school through a combination of expectations that are consciously elevated beyond what the student had held previously and the teaching of a system of academic and personal strategies that are undertaken with an eye toward developing and supporting students' ability to meet those expectations. In my interviews with participants, I was able to learn about their experience in that system of expectations and support as well as tease out some of the ways in which the system is enacted but also in the ways that some students in the system internalize and adapt the things they learn to make a life that is, at least to an extent, satisfying both in terms of academic and economic progress toward a middle or upper socioeconomic status.

What struck me as another goal, one professed by the participants but unremarked in the literature on AVID (although further research may reveal its presence) was a marked loyalty to their families and home cultures. In a way that the Indian schools of mid-twentieth century America were not, AVID's goals seem to be compatible with students' goals of continuing to be welcome members of their home cultures and communities. Perhaps this is the one-sentence finding of this research. As a result of their time in AVID, participants perceived it to have

influenced the way they perform their identities in such a manner that they are able to exist with one foot in their families' world and the other in a world that can transform ambition and aspiration into personal and socioeconomic growth. I find that as a result of their combination of worlds, they are able to remain true both to their traditional values and the values of the society in which they will spend their lives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Central to the present research are matters of identity, power, and agency. I studied a group of people who have experienced a particular intervention at some point during their secondary education that was intended to improve their ability to progress in postsecondary education. That progress, in turn is intended to enable them to be more successful.

“Successful,” however, is a term for which values vary significantly and which requires unpacking in the context of the person who defines it and the society in which she or he defines it. In other words, given the participants' values for “successful,” how did their time in AVID interact with their efforts and their epistemology in their lives? Proceeding from the central difficulty of defining success, i.e. its mercurial nature, constantly shifting from person to person and context to context, how might the researcher seek to make sense of the participants' related experiences?

I employ the poststructuralist theory of performativity put forth by Judith Butler and based on the thinking of Louis Althusser (1971), Michel Foucault (2006), and Jacques Derrida (1982, 1993) to help bridge the gap in intelligibility created by the multiplicity of definitions of successful intervention. While the way each of us constructs both our own identity and the identities of others and how those identities interact with one another is an immensely complicated process, poststructuralist performativity does give us some guidelines for

interpreting not only what we are shown but what we ourselves show. What, then, is poststructuralist performativity and how does it help us understand power and identity?

In order to define poststructuralist performativity, it is perhaps helpful to examine it in the context of positivism as defined by Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba. In *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985), they propose a history of philosophy which divides human history into three “paradigm eras” (p. 18), the prepositivist, positivist, and postpositivist.

The prepositivist era covers the time from 384 BCE (Aristotle) to 1711 CE (the rise of David Hume). According to Lincoln and Guba, this was an era of largely passive attempts to observe and understand nature and its laws. Indeed, Aristotle was of the view that attempts to actively measure nature were likely to interfere with its course and yield an inaccurate understanding. This approach fit within the context of contemporary understandings of the physical, mental and spiritual world and it can be argued that a somewhat hands-off, observational approach to observation serves the qualitative researcher well in the current era.

The positivist era held “science and the scientific method” (p. 19) in high regard. This era’s thinkers used the scientific method as a tool in their effort to improve (by their reckoning) on the understanding handed down to them by the prepositivists through rigorous application of a standardized set of rules which would allow for a slow-motion revolution in the epistemology of the era. By the time positivism was fully realized, the old approach of passive observation of nature no longer sufficed. Thinkers felt empowered to attempt interventions in processes both empirical and intangible. They believed that if they were able to discern the underlying truths which were fundamental to the operations of existence, they could in turn not only explain the forces surrounding them but also predict what would be the outcome of manipulating those forces. While not for the most part claiming a 1:1 causality, positivist thinkers generally saw the

nature of things in terms of sets of laws on which could be predicated theories which could be tested. Such tests would be expected to yield empirical observations which would then either support, disprove, or turn out to be irrelevant to the theories under examination. In the end, positivism, while still valued by some, was found by others to be lacking in the depth and texture needed to deal with the nuances of the observable world. In trying to make everything measurable, say positivism's critics (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), the positivists reduce the objects of their study to the point of being devoid of meaning in relation to their actual selves. The traditional scientific method is shown to have flaws and, while capable of producing uniformity and general predictability, is inadequate to the task of more fully understanding what it purports to measure.

In reaction to these weaknesses in positivism, postpositivism moves away from absolutes and toward a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between theory and data (in that postpositivism presumes theory and data to have a relationship). It also takes into account the axiological notion that while researchers strictly controlling variables may be operating from a shared set of values, the addition of persons other than the researchers who do not share those values would likely skew results. It would be inaccurate, however, to contend that postpositivism is nothing more than a philosophical adjustment to take into account what positivism has left out. Guba and Lincoln (1999) use the analogy of phlogiston versus oxygen to describe the evolution. According to them, positivism and postpositivism both exist as a set of axioms, "basic beliefs" (p. 33), which describe circumstances considered to have some basis in self-evident reality. They differ in the nature of the axioms. Where positivist axioms tend to see things such as the "nature of reality" and "(t)he relationship of the knower to the known" (p. 37) in binary, dichotomous terms, postpositivism, which they refer to as the eponymous

“naturalistic” of their title sees things more holistically, the two events of the binary existing in and through one another. The knower and the known are not opposites but merely positions taken by different entities in different contexts. They influence one another in ways both known and unknown.

From this naturalistic paradigm springs the foundation of Butlerian performativity. Butler approaches the “basic beliefs” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p. 33) of gender theory from a postpositivist/naturalistic perspective. Rather than identifying a human being as objectively and incontrovertibly male or female on the basis, perhaps, of chromosomal or anatomical differences, she posits that “(t)here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.” (Butler, 1990 p. 34). It is these “expressions” which are essential to Butlerian performativity. If we define gender expressions as the “material effects and manifestations in the appropriated consciousness and bodies of women” or, presumably, others such as men, people of varying ethnic and/or racial background, people living in wealth or poverty, people with lots of institutional privilege and people with little, people of varying ability and so forth, then we can begin to describe a process of personality formation that lies outside the traditional dichotomies.

As they pertain to the current research, Butler’s theories inform the work through the question of what influence the participants viewed the AVID intervention as having had on the way(s) in which they understand and express their identities across the spectrum of possibility. For example, did a participant take the teaching of her AVID instructor and tutors as the program’s creators intended and begin envisioning herself not only attending but advancing in post-secondary study? Alternatively, did she reject AVID’s premise altogether and participate in higher education using a different philosophy? Perhaps she used a combination of the two as

part of a mix which contained, as Butler (1993) suggests is possible, both the aspects of her identity which she has produced and those which have been thrust upon her by “regulatory practice” (p. xi). This seems to be an important question and one whose answer can be investigated using the performativity model. That being said, In *Undoing Gender* Butler (2004) writes

(O)ne must also understand that I do not think theory is sufficient for social and political transformation. Something besides theory must take place, such as interventions at social and political levels that involve actions, sustained labor and institutionalized practice, which are not quite the same as the exercise of theory. (p. 204).

Proceeding from this premise, then, one can see the utility of examining the theoretical notion of an identity performed both consciously and unconsciously, the individual both acting and being acted upon through the perspective of a lived life and the perceptions of the individual whose agency and lack thereof informs the behaviors that flow from the intervention, in this case AVID class.

### **Summation**

This introduction has sought to describe the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program in terms of its genesis in Santa Monica, California in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s as a way of addressing the needs of a newly integrated population in one high school and its development into a nationwide and, indeed, an international educational movement. It has also examined the ideas of power, agency, and identity and questions surrounding their foundational qualities as well the ways in which we arrive at our own set of values for power, agency and identity. There has also been a discussion of the author’s personal and familial ties

to at-opportunity populations and discussed how the process of identity formation through conscious and unconscious performance has impacted lives.

The research seeks to investigate young adults' experiences as students in AVID classrooms during their time in secondary education and how they view those experiences as having influenced their construction of their identities as first- and second-year students in higher education. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of interviews with four to eight participants, my goal is to arrive at some insights regarding what AVID's work with students is doing and what students in their turn are taking away from the program both intentionally and unintentionally. In the following chapter, the body of literature regarding AVID, other intervention programs, and the philosophy behind poststructuralist performativity will be discussed. Among the findings in relevant research is the existence of many programs intended to help secondary students reach their full potential. These can be categorized into three distinct yet occasionally overlapping groups. AVID stands apart in the sense that it seeks to infuse an entire school district with its culture, but nevertheless commonalities exist with other programs. Additionally, much has been written over the millennia of human thought about how we become who we are and how we perceive that status in relation to others. In chapter two, there will be a discussion of some of the bases of poststructuralist theories.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **The AVID Program**

Before beginning a review of literature surrounding AVID, it might be beneficial to the reader to explain what AVID is and what it attempts to do as well as how it exists in a school context. To begin with, AVID is an elective course taken by students in secondary schools, generally in grades 7-12. Enrollment takes place following selection of prospective students by the AVID teacher with input from other school leaders and an interview held with the student her or himself. The AVID class takes the place of one of the student's elective choices and is attended in the same way an art, language, or math class would be. During AVID class, students are taught and expected to practice skills intended to develop their proficiency as participants in academic settings. These skills include organization and time management through the use of calendars, binders and backpacks as well as self-advocacy through the use of tutorial requests and advocacy for a point of view through Socratic seminar participation. They are taught about and guided through academic processes such as college evaluation and application and practical aspects of college attendance such as obtaining funding through scholarships and grants. All of this is done with the overall objective of producing, from a student who had demonstrated potential but whose circumstances, for one reason or another, posed a risk to that potential, a young adult capable of achieving high levels of academic accomplishment in both secondary and post-secondary settings.

## **Reform and Achievement**

Among the most consistent threads in American education over the past sixty or more years is the call for reform. People representing a panoply of groups across our demographic spectrum have joined this call for various reasons. One area of interest is the so-called ‘achievement gap,’ a difference in the performance of students who come from different socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds. Generally speaking, white and Asian students from homes in which educational progress is seen as a necessity and is supported by parents who themselves often possess educational credentials have higher scores on standardized tests, higher rates of postsecondary educational aspiration, matriculation, retention, and degree completion. Students from Latin-American households tend to have lower scores and less participation while those from African- and Native American households have lower ratings still. It has historically been believed that some sort of inherent flaw in the nature of such students and their families explained this state of events. More recently such thinking has given way to a view of students of color and students living in poverty, particularly in homes where formal schooling is not well understood or strongly emphasized as not inherently incapable of academic pursuits but simply unprepared (Hansen, 2005).

This study seeks to expand and trouble the nature of the so-called achievement gap by investigating the ways in which participants in the AVID program use the skills they bring to the table in concert with the skills they are taught by the program to develop their identities as learners through a process involving both conscious and unconscious agency. While it may be possible to trace a direct line from the participants’ pre-intervention state to a state in which they are highly skilled, highly motivated, and highly accomplished learners in a university setting, it also seems plausible that some participants may be discovered who have derived lesser or

different benefits from the program. Given that the participants in this research will have completed at least two years of undergraduate study, they may be considered successful by their home communities by dint of having graduated high school and attended some college. It is this very ambiguity in the process of defining ‘success’ that will be the crux of this work.

Also essential to this research is the question of how the ways in which participants understand their society and their place therein interact with the ways in which they are being taught to perceive that society. That is to say that Butlerian performativity posits a tension between who the individual sees himself as being, who society sees, and how those images reflect back and forth between perspectives internal and external to the self. Agency, identity, and power become complex interactions influenced by historical context, expectations on the part of the individual and society and an intricate system of reward and punishment. Butler, Foucault, Derrida, and Kristeva all explore the formation of the self and its relation to the other selves it encounters. The intent of this study is to further that exploration and apply what is learned to meeting the needs of students who, though capable, may need assistance in realizing the full potential of their interaction with the academic world.

### **Research Goals**

The literature surrounding college preparation programs including grants, charter schools, individual intervention programs, schoolwide programs, and district-wide programs like AVID suggests that, in the aggregate, they make a positive difference in their participants’ academic lives. What the literature is lacking is a sense of the ways the students who participate in such interventions both use and are influenced by the experiences they have therein. Research exists on the one or two factors high school and college students consider to have been the most or least influential during the course of their secondary and early postsecondary careers but a deep

exploration not only of the ways they perceive themselves to have been influenced but also the ways in which, from a poststructuralist theoretical point of view, they may be seen to have been influenced unconsciously as they perform and negotiate their academic identities.

Within the relevant literature, the current research seeks to broaden the spectrum of participants with a range of ages, demographic profiles, and levels of education. It also seeks to frame the research questions and data analysis in terms of Judith Butler's notion of identity performativity. While originally applied mainly to gender and sexual identity, this flexible notion has the potential to allow for an expansion of understanding of the influences both within and outside the individual that push one in relation to upward academic and career mobility.

### **Historical Context**

Nearly all of the programs investigated for the current research were begun in the past forty years, many of them since the mid-1990s. There has been an appetite in the United States for non-traditional or outsider approaches to educational reform since the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform: A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) during the administration of President Ronald Reagan (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). School desegregation efforts beginning in the 1970s saw students from many backgrounds sharing campuses and their scores being aggregated to form what some viewed as an indictment of failing public schools (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Set against this backdrop, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) evolved from a program developed at Clairemont High School in Santa Monica, California during the late 1970s and early 1980s. An English teacher named Mary Catherine Swanson and some of her English department colleagues began to work with students who were struggling to make progress toward high school graduation and infrequently

matriculating into higher education (Swanson, 1989). Their efforts to provide “rigor with support” (Swanson et al., 2000) led to a system that is now in place on 4,837 primary and secondary campuses and 41 higher education campuses throughout the United States and internationally from Canada to Europe to Asia to Australia (AVID, 2016). For the purpose of the my research, the literature concerning AVID, its functions and impacts, similar programs, other visions for academic intervention, and the theoretical basis on which AVID’s perceived effect on the participants’ academic experience might be considered will be reviewed here. In order to view AVID in the context of the larger educational reform movement, it may be worthwhile to examine some of the criteria applied to the three types of intervention discussed here.

### **De-Skilling**

Smith and Trist (1988), like other scholars, view school intervention programs through a vocational lens. Writing at a time when the philosophical underpinnings of the public charter school movement were coming together, they advocated a “rationale for public-private collaboration” (p. 2) which in broad terms would allow for corporate and philanthropic entities as well as various government agencies to invest funding and expertise in programs supporting federal laws such as the Job Training Partnership Act (1994) and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act with the objective of producing workers prepared to address what Smith and Trist saw as a mismatch between the skills being sought by employers and those held by current workers and by those entering the workforce. They expressed concern that either an increase in available skill or a decrease in the level of skill necessary to perform tasks in the economy through improved training or through “de-skilling” (p. vii), a process whereby jobs are broken down into their constituent parts and done by less-skilled workers or by machines would be

necessary and sought to implement such a change through public/private consortia which would have the flexibility and funding necessary to implement such changes.

## **Overview of Interventions: Rationales and Methods**

### **Broad Focus**

Heather Osterreich (2000a) prepared an analysis of urban college preparation programs in which she notes that “pre-college programs” (p. 2) that bring together a broad array of strategies, tactics and services appear to have a greater effect on their participants than those which focus more narrowly whether for philosophical or budgetary reasons. It is this apparent effect that makes AVID participants an interesting group for a qualitative study relating to power dynamics. Osterreich (2000b) also finds that programs beginning earlier in a student’s academic career and remaining available throughout that time seem to be the most effective and that “rich academic content,” which AVID considers one of its strong suits, is a characteristic common to effective interventions. This type of content and the concomitant support AVID provides (AVID, 2016) in the form of coursework in the physical sciences and mathematics, the teaching of study skills, test-taking skills, and setting what they describe as a culture of success through high expectations, i.e. the notion that a student “stigmatized as at-risk” (Osterreich, 2000a p. 3) is in fact a very capable person equipped with the agency to determine her own outcomes independent of any potentially adverse circumstances.

### **Research Trends**

In reviewing the existing body of research literature pertaining to AVID in American secondary schools, two major trends emerge. First, there is reason to believe that students who participate in AVID are statistically more likely to enter and persist in higher education than demographically similar students who did not participate in AVID. Second, those who have

participated in the program note a distinct culture both in their AVID elective classes and in their schools as a whole. The education professionals charged with administering the program, training instructors, and leading the classes also have a sense of community not only among themselves but with their students as well. By unpacking these two trends, it is possible to conceptualize what is currently known about the program. That knowledge can in turn inform an attempt to improve the body of research by examining the ways in which students both use and are influenced by the lessons (intended and unintended) they were exposed to in AVID.

### **Research on AVID**

AVID is a program which has existed since 1980 and now has a presence in much of the United States and internationally. It is typically funded with public money and administered by employees of school districts in the United States as well as employees of the AVID Center and AVID district offices (AVID, 2013f). As such, it has been the subject of a number of studies, both qualitative and quantitative from a variety of theoretical perspectives. While this research seeks to examine the ways power is influenced and influential in the lives of students who took part in AVID and went on to two or more years of higher education, other studies have investigated both the inputs and outcomes of the program in various contexts and with various descriptions of participant. Citing a number of studies, AVID (2013k) reports that African Americans, Latinx students, those of low- and middle-income, students who spent their entire high school careers in AVID and those who left it after one or two years have been studied both statistically and through their stories. Among the findings to be had, it was noted that AVID students attend college at a rate one third higher than that of their peers who did not take part in the program and that African Americans experienced increased college attendance rates whether they participated for one or three years. In other research, it was found that longer participation

increased the likelihood of college enrollment and persistence. AVID (2013b) claims that it is less important what cultural capital the student brings into the program than what she or he “accrues” while in the program. On the topic of gaining capital, AVID (2013l) found that AVID, when affiliated with the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) program, an effort by the United States Department of Education to “designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education,” (Department of Education, 2016) increased students’ expectations of their academic attainment from an Associate’s degree to a Bachelor’s degree during two years of participation.

The literature regarding AVID has been produced primarily by a group of researchers affiliated with the University of Texas Pan American, located in Edinburg, Texas in the Rio Grande Valley. It consists of qualitative and mixed-methods studies and falls largely into three categories. The first to be addressed here is student development. AVID’s primary audience is secondary students, mainly in seventh through twelfth grades. University AVID programs exist but have only come into being in the recent past and are not currently widely influential. That being the case, the largest body of research concerns efforts undertaken in the interest of developing students’ attitudes and abilities with an eye to their being able to function as learners in a rigorous classroom. To recapitulate what has been said about AVID already, they try to provide rigor with support. This support is intended to allow students to adjust to the expectations of college coursework and to fulfill them using their own and their peers’ knowledge of curriculum as well as academic procedure. In addition to student development, professional development and the development of a culture in which academic rigor and support are expected are important emphases in the AVID world. Finally, self-assessment seems to be a

priority both for those in charge of AVID as an organization and those at the site and district levels who are interested in determining what effect the program is or is not having on the students who take part in it.

### **Intervention Programs**

The notion that a lack of preparedness means an opportunity for educators to orient young people toward a life of academic and career progress has driven a school reform industry that comprises at least three major approaches. First, there are those who believe that increased funding in strategic areas will lead to a reduction in the achievement gap. Among those are the Dell corporation, maker of personal computers and other electronic equipment. Dell has established the Dell Scholar Program (Dell, 2015) to fund programs in the field.

A second approach involves AVID and similar programs. These programs are seen by their leaders as interventions in students' academic lives. They vary in their focus, methodology, and objectives, but overall can be said to seek to improve students' engagement with and learning of the ways of academia. Funding for these programs covers a broad range of interests from individual philanthropists and foundations to public school districts.

Finally, public charter schools are generally partnerships between a public school district, often located in large urban area with high percentages of students of color who qualify for a federal free and reduced lunch program and are therefore considered to be living in poverty. These arrangements often have a board of directors combining the philanthropic and education communities which work with an elected board of education to provide a specialized school which is free to district students although availability and approach to learning vary widely. Such schools sometimes have benefactors in the form of individuals, corporations, or foundations and may operate in multiple cities.

## **Direct and Indirect Financial Support**

While AVID itself provides no direct financial support to its participants, nor does it charge any fee to students for participation, other programs do provide financial backing and, generally speaking, programs require funding. It is further believed (Osterreich, 2000a) that a student's socioeconomic status is the single "greatest determinant" (p. 4) in college attendance and persistence. That being the case, certain characteristics pertain among those programs considered most effective for the purpose of this discussion. First, there does appear to be a quantifiable advantage to programs which provide a direct stipend of some sort to participants. This notion is beyond the purview of the current research; however, it does offer a potentially interesting avenue for further research. Other finance-related commonalities among "effective" programs (Osterreich, 2000a p. 4) is the provision of assistance in obtaining college financial aid and the pursuit of aid both for participants and for the intervention program itself by the adults administering the program. Grants, scholarships, and sponsorships are targets of this pursuit. Also present in such programs is an effort to build awareness and understanding of the college selection and admission process. Through partnerships with institutions of higher learning and other concerned entities, programs seek to introduce their participants to the opportunities available to them, help them make a choice, and then make that choice a reality. Cultural, financial, and academic considerations are all taken into account during this phase of the interventions. AVID (AVID, 2013e) places this effort high among its priorities. In order to maximize the effectiveness of their teachers and other staff, "effective" programs are also found to invest in staff development in the many fields in which they intervene for their participants. Inservice learning is recommended for improving understanding of and outcomes related to the high school-to-university transition process including graduation assurance, college admission

assistance, remediation when necessary, and teaching techniques and cultural understanding intended to be effective with the participants involved.

### **Similar and Competing Programs**

Of course, AVID is not the only program in existence which seeks to provide the nurturing environment and rigorous curriculum desired by parents, school personnel, and students. As previously discussed in this chapter, intervention programs can be divided into three broad categories. The first is programs seeking to affect change through financial support. This group can be said to be the progenitor of the others on a certain level. While there are innumerable grants and foundations doing work in the field of education, The Dell Scholar Program seeks primarily to support college preparation efforts (Dell, 2015). It makes funding available for the development and implementation of qualifying programs that are aimed at students within the middle range of academic accomplishment who would be first-generation college-goers and/or belong to demographic groups underrepresented in higher education. The program looks for rigor, a “non-cognitive” evaluation system that goes beyond numbers, evidence of success, a strong mentoring/advising component, and replicability in other contexts.

Among the recipients of its grants are numerous charter school companies and intervention programs other than AVID. Charters such as Cristo Rey (Cristo Rey, 2016) for low-income youth in Chicago, YES Prep (YES Prep, 2016), which admits students via lottery in Houston, and Uplift (Uplift 2016a) in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex operate independently of local public schools yet are considered public schools for attendance purposes and do receive some or all of the taxpayer funding a traditional public school would. While state requirements vary, they are generally held to the same accountability measures as other public schools and they are not allowed to charge tuition or select only the strongest of the students who apply. The

schools examined for this review generally held to philosophies emphasizing collaboration, encouragement, academic rigor, and accountability. They provide data based largely on standardized test scores about their students' growth in their programs. What appears to be missing is data on student retention and matriculation into higher education.

While AVID's principle of rigor with support is echoed in many charter schools' mission or vision statements, a variety of other programs exist to provide these and other emphases. Philadelphia Futures, for example, emphasizes providing low-income and first generation college students with the support, both financially through scholarships and personally through mentoring, needed to succeed at the university level without involving themselves specifically in the students' high school careers (Philadelphia Futures, 2016). Upward Bound is a program of the United States government that seeks to provide instruction in mathematics, science, writing, literature, and languages other than English (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). They target their assistance toward low-income, first generation students and those from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education including those with disabilities, foster children, and the children of homeless parents. Project Grad, in Houston, focuses on preparing students to graduate high school on time and enroll in college and then provides assistance in the form of mentoring to college students (Project Grad, 2016). These programs broadly represent the emphases of the entities supported by the Dell Scholar Program. While they have many of the same goals as AVID, none approach its scope and none rely so heavily on direct payments from districts for work done in traditional public schools. Indeed, they tend to operate with only tangential integration in the schools where their students are enrolled whereas AVID strives for full integration of its model throughout the site and district culture at the secondary level.

## **Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)**

### **The AVID Program**

Advancement Via Individual Determination, generally referred to as AVID, is at its essence a college preparatory intervention program aimed largely at students who, though showing academic promise in the form of grades or test scores in early grades, also have demographic or other indicators which suggest that targeted involvement on the part of trained teaching staff and administrators in later grades might have a better chance of finishing high school, matriculating to a college or university and persisting in study there until graduation (AVID, 2013l). From its beginnings as an intervention strategy in one classroom in one high school in California, it has spread across large swaths of the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and the Middle East for a total of 4,837 schools as of 2013. It is led by an executive team comprised of experts in their fields including school superintendents, business people, and curriculum, research, and professional development experts. This team is headed by the founder, Mary Catherine Swanson, a former English teacher and department head in whose classroom the program was born (AVID, 2013g).

### **AVID and Paternalism**

Paternalistic thinking can be found at the heart of the school intervention epistemology. Would-be reformers, regardless of their motivations, see deficiencies in the training being provided by conventional public schools and, for a multitude of reasons and in a multitude of ways, set out to repair those deficiencies. The myriad ways in which this is attempted seem to contribute to a bewildering profusion of reform and intervention efforts. Although a modern reader might find the language in Smith and Trist (1988) archaic in its paternalistic discussion of workforce readiness and while many reform efforts have evolved to minimize this paternalism,

there remains an element of ‘knowing what’s best’ for at-opportunity students. This can be seen in AVID’s determination to enroll its students in advanced, honors, and Advanced Placement courses (AVID, 2013g) in a blanket fashion without apparent concern for the students’ preferences or interests. That being said, it may be more accurate to make a distinction among the three categories previously discussed (charter schools, intervention programs, and philanthropic giving) between those focused on college preparation and those focused on economic achievement. While the two are by no means mutually exclusive, it seems reasonable to make clear what type of program AVID is. AVID is intended to prepare the participant for matriculation to a four-year university in the ideal case or a staggered matriculation (community college-to-university) if need be (AVID, 2013e).

### **AVID Essentials**

In order to put action to this intent, AVID employs a strategy that is tripartite. Writing, inquiry and collaboration are among AVID’s “essentials” (Swanson et al., 2000, p. 27). In an effort to promote the practice of these three skills for their students, they enlist the aid of family and school staff to ensure that students remain enrolled in high level AP, honors, International Baccalaureate and other courses that are designed to meet relevant college entrance requirements and to prepare students for the college entry examinations they will face. While enrolled in these courses, the AVID essentials are used to teach students what they are capable of and how best to utilize their resources to achieve the high expectations they, their families, and their AVID mentors have. Rather than focus on reaching the next milestone, AVID students are pushed to “learn to process information more deeply, review things they didn’t understand the first time, and make connections between what they’re doing now and what they learned earlier” (Swanson et al., 2000 p. 28).

The essentials themselves, which are required to be implemented and are audited regularly by regional and national AVID staff in order for a school or district to use the AVID name and logo, consist of eleven principles. First, AVID focuses on “students in the middle (2.0 to 3.5 G.P.A. as one indicator)” (Swanson et al., 2000, p.29). All participants, both students and staff, must choose to participate. No one may be coerced into taking AVID as an elective or teaching or supervising the class. AVID must also be fully implemented throughout the school. This means that the class must be a part of the regular school day and that the administration must be committed to promulgating the view that the students involved are receiving important instruction and not just “frills” (Swanson et al., 2000, p. 29). As mentioned, students are required to enroll in challenging coursework that will prepare them for college entrance. Extensive effort is put into teaching writing skills including the use of writing in order to learn as well as to communicate. Writing logs, timed writings, and Cornell notes are features familiar to veterans of the program. Inquiry is another pillar of the AVID philosophy. Retention of knowledge, while important, is not viewed as the ultimate goal of education in the AVID worldview. The use of that knowledge to understand complicated phenomena and to create new knowledge and understanding are important as is collaborative work in the field of inquiry. Regarding collaboration, it too is taught as a skill much like writing and inquiry. Students are taught and expected to organize themselves quickly into groups containing the skills needed to approach an inquiry and to identify and apportion tasks to group members depending on their abilities. Goals are identified and tasks are accomplished by the group in ways which support the expectations-support-rigor emphases of the program.

By way of support, tutors are hired and brought into the AVID classroom. They generally come from colleges and universities and are trained in the AVID paradigm. Equally

importantly, AVID programs are looking for someone their students can not only respect but also identify with and see as role models for their own academic pursuits. As another form of support and of ensuring that the program's academic expectations and rigor are sufficient, each school and district's program is required to submit to auditing by the AVID Data System which analyzes student data to establish levels of progress on the part of the students and the schools' AVID programs. These data are monitored and compared to the schools' historic performance as well as the performance of other schools. These analyses and comparisons are then used as the basis for improvements to the program. School districts must commit to providing the resources necessary to implement an AVID program fully in terms of staffing, materials, data collection and analysis, and staff development in order to lay claim to AVID participation.

### **AVID Emphases**

Mary Catherine Swanson et al. (2000) describes the goal of AVID as providing "rigor with support" (p. 26). She begins by noting that many of the students who are served by the program are "overlooked" (p. 26) by their school systems, their potential for attending and completing university study not recognized by the educators in their lives. She also notes the challenge for all people in academics but especially young people who are vulnerable in an education system wherein they can be said to hold the wrong cards to rebound from failure without help. This lack of expectation and lack of compensation for the particular difficulties faced by students located at the margins (Spivak, 1988) create a lack of "perceived confidence" (p. 27) and a need for "rigor with support and hard work." She sees this troika of rigor, support, and hard work coming together as a single unit which does not function without all of its parts. Rigor without support leads to failure and support without expectation allows the student's potential to go untapped. Both rigor and support come up short in the absence of hard work on

the part of the student and the AVID personnel. If all three are present in the appropriate proportions, however, there is a marked increase in “perceived confidence” (Swanson et al., 2000, p. 27) and a change in outlook that admits the possibility of success in secondary and higher education.

### **AVID Outcomes**

The interventions mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs are intended to provide rigor with support (Swanson, 1989, Swanson et al., 2000) to students who might otherwise struggle to reach their full academic potential. The fundamental character of AVID’s interventions, indeed an ethos that pops up often in the literature (Ruenzel, 1997) is the notion of students who must overcome such systemic barriers as racism, classism, poverty, lack of support at home and school and lack of high academic expectations who are met at school with precisely those things: high expectations in the form of rigorous coursework and the expectation that they not only can but must and will meet those expectations. Beginning with a raw clay of students who have been shunted into courses which, despite their lofty-sounding names, are remedial courses the student makeup of which is cause to suspect the hand of bigotry, AVID teachers and administrators set out to give their students the tools necessary not only to graduate high school but to gain admission to the higher education option that best suits them and to remain there as a serious and academically successful student.

While statistics, numbers, and lists serve to give some idea of the accomplishments of those who take part in AVID as students, teachers, or administrators, stories often have a richness to them that is beyond the ability of numbers to convey. Indeed, it was stories that, to a notable extent, guided AVID’s development from a single classroom to the organization it is currently. Its founder Mary Catherine Swanson recalls that she first taught students note-taking

skills in order to be able to determine what they were being taught in their other classes (Ruenzel, 1997). She moved from a re-writing of what was on the board in their classes to a re-phrasing in the students' own words as proof that they understood the concepts and from there "psychological changes" (Ruenzel, 1997, p. 31) began to take place. Students started to become more attentive because of the note-taking requirement but then became more critical consumers of the educational product as they saw its quality becoming more relevant to their needs. If they were not taught at least adequately, they would be unable to fulfill the demands placed on them in the form of note-taking. This in turn made them more fully students and, as a side-effect, made their teachers take their needs more seriously. This virtuous cycle helped them, almost unwittingly, to become more like traditionally college-bound students.

Transitioning from a disengaged student with the ability to perform academically but without the skills or the desire to do so to a student who could be a strong inquirer and learner can be seen as the first hoped-for outcome of the AVID approach. The second part involves situating the learner in the college-bound and college-attending world. Activities such as field trips to colleges and universities, inviting guest speakers from the world of higher education (of particular value if they are of a background similar to that of their audience and/or had knowledge of or experience with AVID), and employing tutors who are local college students provide benefits on at least two fronts. First, they provide the brass tacks knowledge needed to pursue higher learning credentials. As AVID serves many students who enter secondary education without a strong understanding of the steps which need to be taken in order to participate in university study and without the necessary social capital to learn from friends, family, and associates, providing that knowledge is said to be fundamental to its students' academic progress (Ruenzel, 1997). Second, AVID helps teach, through a "straightforward,

common-sense approach” (p. 32) how to progress in traditional American secondary schools and how to apply that knowledge in the formation of a college-bound persona.

Black, Little, and McCoach (2008), reporting on the effectiveness of the AVID intervention program among students of ethnic minority and lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, found that “rigor with support” (Swanson, Mehan, & Hubbard, 1995, Swanson et al., 2000) as provided by the school-wide program met the requirements of the Advanced Placement Incentive Program (APIP) to participate in its grant program. The APIP is an effort by the United States Department of Education to encourage students in Title I schools to take Advanced Placement courses in their middle and high schools and to take and pass the associated tests. In order to meet those requirements, AVID needed to have a data collection, analysis, and reporting system which would enable it to demonstrate the “scope and effectiveness” (Black et al., 2008 p. 112) of AVID’s interventions.

In their review of numerous studies on the effectiveness of the AVID program, they found a good deal of support for AVID but mixed results on its actual outcomes. According to the authors,

At the high school level, positive program effects have been reported in the areas of (a) performance on standardized achievement tests, (b) school attendance rates, (c) GPA, (d) enrollment in advanced courses, and (e) college enrollment and acceptance rates. (Black et al., 2008 p. 113)

In other studies, they found that AVID students generally had higher grade point averages and that girls’ were higher than boys’ whether enrolled in the AVID elective course or not. Among AVID enrollees, gender, race/ethnicity, home income and the number of years enrolled were related to grade point average. When data were collected related to student, parent, and teacher

perceptions of the program, they were found to be strongly supportive. These findings hold relevance for the current research. The present research, which proposes to study students from a variety of backgrounds with a variety of experiences and to analyze the data collected thereby through the lens of post-structuralist performativity may yield insight into the ways in which these factors influence the student academic experience.

### **AVID and Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital was Pierre Bourdieu's (1973) term for the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that allow individuals to participate in particular roles within society. Over a broad spectrum of social groups within a population, certain manifestations imply belonging or not-belonging. An expensive vehicle in an impoverished area, for example, will connote different things depending on a series of attendant factors. A large number of inferences can be made, albeit not necessarily accurately, by asking and answering questions based on an in-depth understanding of the context. How does the driver look? Is the vehicle customized or does it appear just off the showroom floor? Is the area urban or rural? Do the demographic characteristics of the driver and passengers match or not match those of the area's inhabitants? To turn the scenario around, does the new student at an exclusive school such as Sidwell Friends in Washington, D.C. have opinions on matters of interest to her colleagues? Who is the best dressage instructor? Where did she go to preschool? For what politicians or lobbying firms do her parents work? It is these questions and the answers thereto that allow us to decide how we and others fit or do not fit in given environments.

Proceeding from this understanding, Bernhardt (2013) reports on AVID as a program which is focused on students who are part of a demographic group or groups the members of which make up a smaller proportion of university students than their representation in society as

a whole. Many refer to these as “traditionally underrepresented populations” (Bernhardt, 2013 p. 203). Bernhardt references, as does Swanson et al. (2000), the idea of academic rigor with support. He also notes education professor Pedro Noguera’s observation that “AVID creates a classroom environment where kids are encouraged to take learning seriously, and, secondly, to see themselves as scholars.” (p. 204). This process reinforces the need to address the difficulties raised by Jackson (2003) in bringing students from a viewpoint that not only are academic pursuits unworthy of being taken seriously but if they are taken seriously they can result in significant damage to one’s social standing. By creating that safe space and encouraging peer support, AVID can transform school achievement in the form of grades, test scores, and enrollment in rigorous classes from violating social norms to supporting them by changing the social group and what it values in terms of social capital.

Continuing the theme of social capital, Dolan (2008) looked into some of the challenges facing and solutions available to minority students as they navigate the path through secondary and higher education. He calls attention to the notion that it is insufficient merely to be able to capitalize and punctuate sentences or name all of the state capitals. While this type of lower-order (Bloom, 2001) thinking is needed, we exist in an era in which innovation is seen as a way to advance one’s goals and which requires higher-order thinking in the form of analysis, evaluation, and creation. What is required to graduate from high school may not be what is needed to enter and succeed in higher education. Because of this disconnect between what is required and what is optimal, Dolan (2008) finds mentors to be of specific benefit. From a practical point of view, high school and college students need help navigating a complicated and sometimes alien set of requirements and options. From a more affective point of view, having someone who has a vested interest in their lives and helps to hold them accountable helps

students take their learning and academic progress more seriously, i.e. it invests them with the cultural capital of which Bourdieu wrote. Garibaldi (2009), studying black males in the New Orleans public school system, found that while a gap remained wherein black males lagged behind black females in academic achievement benefited from the sort of mentorship proposed by Dolan (2008), only provided from an earlier age. While rather clearly acknowledging the gains black males have made, he proposes looking into putting in place systems of tutoring and group building that not only build up confidence in one's academic ability but also that diminish the negative view of strong academic performance that he observed among his participants' peers. By providing this support from Pre-K through graduate school, he believes it is possible to reduce the social barriers to entry into the world of higher-level thought and achievement.

### **Relationships in AVID**

Columnist David Brooks, writing in *The New York Times* (June 14, 2016), suggests that as human society has developed, philosophers have tended to de-emphasize the interrelated nature of humanity, of our nature as a social creature. He writes that “(c)ontemporary social science was built on the idea that we're self-interested, calculating creatures. This... has caused unimaginable harm, especially in the sphere of education.” Thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, and Butler would make the point that not all of our decisions are as calculating or as self-interested as Brooks' reading of sociological thinking suggests and indeed that external forces influence our decisions and behaviors as much as anything that goes on within our own consciousness. That being said, a case can be made for the harm Brooks (2016) describes.

Teachers have been known to say that they became teachers for the intangible rewards of the work. Brooks (2016) writes that “(e)ducation is one of those spheres where the heart is inseparable from the head.” This appears to be the case with AVID. A qualitative study by

Parker, Eliot, and Tart (2013) investigated a group of young African-American males in southeastern North Carolina. Both current enrollees and alumni were interviewed regarding their views on education and the ways in which their AVID experience had influenced their social and academic lives. They found that for the students, the “family-like” (p. 153) relationships built in the AVID classroom encouraged them to engage with the academic process more than previously. They also noted that specific techniques taught by the program to enhance students’ study and workload management skills as well as an overall increase in the extent to which the participants viewed education led to a positive view of the experience. Of interest to the authors was the notion of a “delicate balancing act” (p. 157) performed by African-American males in the school environment. While they face pressure to pass courses and graduate high school, they also face pressure to look “cool” (p. 157). They “dismiss expending effort for academic achievement while condoning activities and relationships that reject traditional standards of academic success” (p. 157). While this balancing act is far from unheard of in academics, the authors contend that their review of the relevant literature gives the impression that the risks of failing in it are seen as particularly high among its practitioners.

Taking as a starting point AVID’s intent to provide rigor with support and stipulating on the basis of other research that AVID did have a strengthening effect on students’ social and academic skills “which leads to education prioritization and accessing rigorous curricula” (p. 158), they interviewed nine participants, two in ninth grade, four in twelfth grade, and three enrolled in college, discern how African-American males were affected by AVID socially, academically and in terms of their attitudes toward school. They used different interview questions for high school and college students. High school students were asked to identify and describe someone in their school who was particularly influential to them and to describe their

own expectations of themselves in the academic realm. College students were asked how they made the decision to attend college and in what way(s) AVID had helped them academically.

Through deductive analysis of transcripts of the participants' responses, they were able to draw out four themes. First, the students credited their AVID classes, fellow students as well as teachers, for giving them "a close-knit group of people that I could interact with and a teacher that I could talk to when I needed help" (p. 160). All of their participants credit their AVID elective course teacher as being the most helpful person at school through such means as arranging tutors, helping with assignments and projects, encouraging students, and offering advice on high school and college matters. Second, all participants believed themselves to be doing well academically and making efforts to improve. They showed an eagerness to enact plans to improve their mostly-B grades. This determination along with their high expectations for themselves suggested that the assistance provided by their teachers and peers had led them to "(get) closer to future career goals by excelling in school" (p. 161). The third finding was that between the specific techniques, such as Cornell notes, taught and the spurring of their AVID teacher along with the accountability provided both by their teachers and peers in the program, the net effect was in improvement in their readiness for college in terms of courses taken and grade point average accumulated. Finally, many of the participants found their attitudes toward school changed. They attributed their very college attendance as opposed to falling into criminality or unskilled labor to the influence of their AVID program, particularly the influence of class alumni who had gone on to college. "Every African-American male that I know that has been in AVID has gone to college", remarked one participant (p. 162).

## **Professional Development**

Another aspect of the AVID program that features prominently in the literature is the way in which the adults who take part in the program are selected, prepared, mentored, developed, and evaluated. AVID considers the selection of the teachers who lead their elective classes as well as the administrators who provide support, guidance, and resources for it some of the most important people in the program (Watt, Huerta, & Mills, 2010b). That being said, many teachers can recount instances in which school and district administrators did not use criteria with which they agreed to choose personnel for a given activity. Watt, Huerta and Mills (2010b) found evidence of administrators not using the criteria set forth by AVID's national leadership (AVID, 2013j). They believe this to be the case at least in part because those administrators underestimate the importance of the AVID teacher. In a different study, Watt, Mills and Huerta (2010) found that teachers relied on the AVID site coordinator (another district employee who oversees not only the teaching of the AVID elective but also the overall implementation on-site of the AVID model and who is partially responsible for creating the school culture desired under AVID standards) as a sort of liaison between themselves and their students and the building administration.

A major emphasis of the AVID professional development model is the summer institute. This annual tradition is envisioned as an opportunity for AVID Center personnel and district personnel to come together to learn and collaborate with the objective of becoming better teachers, leaders, and mentors. While this professional development opportunity was largely viewed as helpful by the teachers surveyed by Watt, Mills and Huerta (2010), the impact appeared to have been weighted more heavily toward those on the less experienced end of the spectrum. The most significant increase in self-perception as a leader and in observed leadership

behaviors appeared to occur during the first and second summers of attendance. At these institutes, female teachers and administrators gave more evidence of leadership than their male colleagues. In another study, Watt, Huerta and Mills (2010b), examining the effect of the summer institute on the way AVID was implemented during the following school year found that teachers who participate in summer professional development see themselves more as leaders in their schools. How much was again dependent on gender, level of education, teaching experience and how much or how little AVID professional development the teacher had experienced. In a survey of 3,100 teachers over the impact AVID was having on school culture and climate, Watt, Huerta, and Mills (2010a) found that mature AVID schools had a higher incidence of the characteristics AVID looks for in its schools than did schools with less fully developed programs. They also found that AVID site coordinators tended to feel more strongly about adherence to the AVID precepts than did non-coordinator teachers.

While AVID and the districts that use it put significant resources into developing the professionals who implement the program and work with the students, parents, district officials and the national AVID headquarters (AVID 2013j), the benefits of that development are seen as being uneven and the role of district administrators in picking an AVID teacher and supporting the culture and climate of AVID in the school is seen as fundamental to the program realizing its potential in terms of student academic gain.

### **Student Development**

Working independently from AVID at the University of Texas Pan America in Edinberg, Texas, a team of researchers led by Karen Watt has studied AVID's work on student development. The particulars of this work vary from site to site and even from one AVID elective class to another but a thread running through a significant portion of their work is the

change they find occurring between the beginning of a participant's time in the program and the end. For example, in one study of college anticipations, aspirations and expectations, and the measures taken to move toward them, they found that across four groups of high school students in the tenth and twelfth grades who were AVID or GEAR UP participants, the programs together provided access to "social and cultural capital that might not otherwise have been available to them (Lozano, Watt & Huerta, 2009). Another study (Watt, Huerta, & Lozano, 2007) looked at four groups, three of which were in AVID or GEAR UP and one which was not and therefore served as a control. They examined students' educational aspirations and anticipations, their knowledge of college entrance requirements and financial aid procedures and availability as well as their math course achievement. Using statistical analysis and participant conversation interviews, they performed a mixed methods analysis. Among their findings were that almost all of the students, AVID/GEAR UP and control, expected to attend college. However, among the AVID/GEAR UP students, they found higher aspirations and a much higher level of academic preparation in the form of advanced placement coursework, higher level math courses, and courses taken for college credit.

In addition to studying expectations, Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, and Alkan (2008) looked at retention behaviors and social/cultural capital. This was a multiple case study of high school seniors in California and Texas conducted through interviews with teachers and administrators and surveys of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. They found that a personal bond between the AVID students and their teachers and administrators fostered a sense of nurturing which made them more likely to continue their involvement in the program. The family-like atmosphere of the AVID class was found to have led to higher morale in terms of school engagement, higher self-esteem and higher reported determination to progress in

academically rigorous environments. These affective factors in turn translated to easing students' navigation of administrative challenges and improved the school program's articulation as students moved from grade to grade and from high school into higher education.

Having matriculated, Mendiola, Watt, and Huerta (2010) studied the post-secondary progress of Mexican-American AVID students, who are a significant AVID demographic, from three high schools who entered the same university in South Texas. They were interested in how components of the AVID experience influenced their college experience and what measures indicated being "on track." Through a combination of interviews and analysis of statistics collected over the course of these students' academic careers, they found that AVID students were better prepared for post-secondary study because they had been exposed to academic rigor during their secondary studies. Other experiences found to have been beneficial were Cornell notes, time- and information-organization strategies, small- and large-group collaboration, presentations, determination coaching, and an overall positive experience in terms of the relationships and bonds formed in the AVID program in high school were all important to the students as they made their way in college. Among the students studied, seventy-nine percent were on track to graduate in six years versus fifty-six percent nationally and twenty-eight percent at the university studied.

It is worth emphasizing that AVID serves a disproportionate number of students belonging to demographic groups which are under-represented in higher education in the United States. One study sought to examine the ways in which AVID and other college preparation programs help those students succeed. Watt, Huerta, and Alkan (2011) used a mixed methods approach to look at fifty AVID graduates at four year universities. They found higher retention rates and potential graduation rates than the overall local, state and national populations. In their

study, they found that meeting AVID's requirements was a strong predictor of post-secondary academic success while advanced placement coursework and having had four years of math classes were not significant predictors.

Taken together, the literature on student development throughout the AVID program (and GEAR UP where applicable) seems to suggest that what could be called the 'soft' advantages of the program, specifically the high expectations, support, bonding and sense of inclusion as well as the practical lessons, i.e. note taking, organization, presentations and collaboration combine to create a quantifiable leg up for some students. While this understanding from the literature gives us a broad-brush sort of understanding of the outcomes one might expect from AVID, the present research seeks to delve more deeply into individual experiences and to analyze them in terms of the changes wrought in the way participants see themselves as empowered or disempowered to perform their identities.

### **School Indicators**

AVID sees itself as a college preparation program for youths who have demonstrated characteristics that are associated with academic pursuits such as intelligence, curiosity, and determination but whose circumstances may not allow them to develop those characteristics or whose socioeconomic groups are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. As seen in the preceding two sections, a body of literature exists which examines the work done by the program to develop its teachers and administrators and by those professionals to develop the potential of their students. Students, however, are not the only audience with an interest in AVID outcomes. Because AVID is largely funded in the United States with taxpayer dollars, there is significant pressure from states, the federal government and individual school districts to determine the program's impact. Given the predilection of education agencies for quantitative

analysis, a number of studies have been done to gauge the effectiveness of AVID in a variety of contexts.

In a 2006 study, Watt, Powell, Mendiola, and Cossio examined ten schools in five Texas school districts looking for improvement. As data, they analyzed graduation or completion rates, advanced course enrollment, Advance Placement test results and students in accelerated graduation programs. The analysis matched students across metrics demographically. They found increases in scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (T.A.A.S) that were higher than those observed in the overall population. Graduation rates increased in AVID schools while they dropped in non-AVID schools and it was also noted, although the import was unclear, that enrollment had increased in schools with AVID programs and dropped in non-AVID schools. A differential has been found to exist between AVID schools with a mature (four years or older) program and those with developing programs. Watt, Huerta, & Cossio (2004) studied four secondary campuses which had implemented AVID four years prior to the study using AVID measurement instruments to identify strengths and weaknesses of the programs. They found, based on the level of certification held by schools under AVID standards that supportive and involved principals improved the program. Supportive principals were defined as sharing in the responsibility for the program's well-being, participating fully in planning, implementation, and professional development. Other beneficial factors included low teacher turnover, good resource application, and making allowances for teacher practices such as common planning.

Evaluating AVID students versus non-AVID students within the same schools, Watt, Powell, and Mendiola (2004) studied ten schools that had implemented AVID. A total of 1,291 AVID students were compared to their schoolwide averages in the areas of test scores,

attendance rates, advanced course enrollment, graduation rates, and state school accountability scores over the course of three years. All ten schools improved their state ratings and AVID students out-performed their peers on standardized tests and in their attendance rates, suggesting greater engagement and increased learning both of course curricula and of test-taking skills. They were also found to be more likely to enroll in courses which would prepare them to meet college admission criteria. Another study (Watt, Yanez, & Cossio, 2002) looked at both baseline data (grade point average, enrollment, attendance, and T.A.A.S. and Advanced Placement test scores) as well as structured interviews with teachers, counselors, and administrators to find out how AVID was impacting access to advanced courses, school culture and policy, achievement levels, the rate of students on-track for graduation, and college attendance rates. They found that expanding access to rigorous courses by dropping prerequisites enabled underrepresented student groups to enter and succeed in those classes and dispel some of the stereotypes which had become a part of the school culture. Not only did they find that teachers of advanced placement courses were pleased with the AVID students' work, they found the teachers themselves adopting some of the techniques introduced by the AVID elective course teachers in their implementation of the program. The most promising results were found in schools where administrators supported the implementation of the program and where there was a strong AVID instructor who took ownership of the course and her or his mission to change the school climate. In such schools, AVID students outpaced their peers' average in both standardized test scores and attendance rates.

### **AVID and Educational Achievements**

With regard to the college readiness aspects of the AVID program, several studies have suggested that there is a difference in the higher education participation between AVID students

and those who have never participated. Guthrie and Guthrie (2002b) conducted a four-year longitudinal study looking at the high school outcomes of students who had taken AVID in middle school. Citing the “dramatic” growth of middle school AVID due to what they called a perception that “it has become increasingly clear that assistance and support for low-income and underachieving students has to begin earlier than grade 9” (p. 2), they assembled a group of 435 AVID students in order to establish a baseline for future years of their study, during which they anticipated adding students until the number of participants reaches 1,100. They followed their participants’ academic careers through and beyond high school. Their study looked at four “performance indicators” (p. 4): high school grade point average, A-F credits earned, and scores on the ninth grade Scholastic Aptitude Test and enrollment in advanced placement courses over the course of four school years from 1996 to 2000. They found no statistically significant difference in grade point averages from AVID to non-AVID students or between students who had taken AVID for more or less years. Students who took algebra in middle school (as dictated by AVID’s emphasis on rigorous coursework with support) earned significantly higher grade point averages in high school than those who did not. This grade point advantage held up but only slightly (2.69 versus 2.66) after the second year’s cohort was added.

They point out that while the grade point differential dipped, the “accumulation of A-F credits” (p. 3) remained higher for students with two years of AVID than for those with one year or less. While not much higher (106.8 credits/student with two years of AVID versus 103.9 for those with none and 103.5 for those with one year), Guthrie and Guthrie (2002b) took the view that the rise suggested an ongoing upward trend. Ninth grade Scholastic Aptitude Test scores showed a similar upward trend, rising from 39.2 after one year to 42.0 after the second year. A more significant finding was made with regard to advanced placement course taking. Among

students who had never taken AVID, only five percent enrolled in three or more advanced placement courses as opposed to 12.5 percent of those who had taken two years.

Guthrie and Guthrie (2002a) also studied the academic pursuits of AVID graduates. According to their study, 95 percent of survey respondents reported being enrolled in higher education and “three fourths reported attending 4-year colleges – a rate almost three times that of the state average – and nearly 80% of AVID graduates enrolled continuously in college since leaving high school.” (p. 13) Among those students, it found that 40 percent of the students who had graduated in 1996 were college seniors who were on track to graduate in four or five years and that 70 percent of the 1997 graduates were on track as well as of 2000. Also of interest, particularly with regard to this research, Guthrie and Guthrie (2002a) asked participants about continued contact with their AVID “family” (p. 16) post-graduation. Of those asked, 46.4 percent reported that they were still in contact with their AVID teachers and 51 percent were still in touch with their classmates. In addition, they were asked to “name the hardest thing about college” and “what they wished AVID had better prepared them for in college” (p. 19). They found things like scheduling, keeping up with courses, self-discipline, and an overall full schedule challenging and felt that AVID could have better prepared them for the hectic pace of university life. This may well be a valid critique as nothing in the literature thus far has suggested an emphasis on the sort of holistic life management proposed by Nel Noddings in *Happiness and Education* (2003).

Examining how AVID and other efforts undertaken to improve college preparation of high school students may have contributed to “the college success of underrepresented students enrolled in community colleges and 4-year universities” (Huerta, Watt & Reyes, 2013 p. 86). Huerta, Watt & Reyes (2013) found that AVID graduates scored higher in measures of outcomes

such as freshman year retention which suggest academic success, defined as completing a four-year degree in six years or less, at a rate higher than that of their universities' student bodies as a whole. They also examined academic resilience, which they defined as "the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences" (Wang, Haertal, & Walberg, 1994, p. 46 in Huerta, Watt & Reyes, 2013, p. 88). Among the adversities they cite are being first generation college students, living off campus, working full- or part-time, and enrollment in community colleges. This mixed methods study found that of the 85 students who participated, 84 percent were Hispanic, 79 percent were economically disadvantaged as measured by participation in free and reduced lunch programs in high school, and 83 percent were first generation students neither of whose parents had completed an associate's or bachelor's degree. They had been enrolled in AVID for between two and four years in high school and 82 percent of them had completed at least one advanced placement course. Huerta, Watt and Reyes (2013) found that "AVID graduates at universities were significantly more likely to meet the operational definition of college success..., be on track to graduate from college within six years..., and not enroll in remedial courses once in college" (p. 95).

### **Comparisons**

AVID maintains statistics regarding its student population and their achievements in the realms of test taking, college acceptance, course taking, and the completion of high school curricula designed to meet university entry requirements. They also compare themselves to students who have not participated in the AVID program. Their website reports that "(m)ost AVID students are underrepresented minorities – Latinos and African Americans – who may lack a college-going tradition in their family and whose success is critical to closing the

achievement gap.” It also shows that AVID students overall and when broken out by ethnicity as Native American, African American, or Hispanic/Latinx took AP examinations at a significantly higher rate than the national average for each of the aforementioned categories. Their college acceptance rates stand at 76% and 57% of AVID eighth graders took Algebra as opposed to 39% nationwide. Finally, AVID seniors are reported by the organization (2013i) to be more likely to have completed four-year college entrance requirements at a rate of 93% to 36%. In addition to the AVID program for native English speakers, they offer a program called English Learner College Readiness (ELCR) (AVID, 2013a) which works to promote not only the development of English language proficiency but also proficiency and literacy in the student’s first language. This biliteracy approach is believed in the English as a second or other language teaching community to help students develop stronger ties to the academic process as it does not seek to divorce them from their home language and by extension from their home culture (G. Lopez, personal communication, June, 2007).

### **Agency, Identity, and the Self**

#### **Agency**

Proceeding from the idea that student agency matters to such an extent that it may be considered an integral part of the teaching/learning dialogue, we might heed the words of William James. “Our thought, incessantly deciding, chooses one of many possible selves or characters and forthwith reckons it no shame to fail in any of those not adopted expressly as its own.” (in Jackson, 2003 p. 579) In both the Indian boarding schools of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the schools attended by today’s struggling learners, agency, and by extension identity, were and are foremost considerations. Stories abound about bright, capable young men and women who, because of the identity that is most comfortable to them for a

panoply of reasons, choose not to associate themselves with students and programs which value the allocation of substantial resources in terms of time, mental effort, and even psychological discomfort in furtherance of intellectual growth, academic advancement and, potentially, material gain (Jackson, 2003).

Although academic failure has been studied extensively, a less robust body of literature exists examining academic success (Jackson, 2003) despite its importance to society. The idea of “identity congruence or conflict” (Jackson, 2003 p. 581) could play an important role in designing such things as common planning, student enrichment programs, and other measures designed to limit what may turn out to be areas of such conflict. The issue here is to understand the factors that make a given course of action, for example one’s engagement with activities such as doing homework, reading independently, studying seriously for tests and engaging fully in projects and other learning activities, either congruent or in conflict with our agency. What ideas about ourselves and the ways in which others view us do we take into account, even if unconsciously, that make us more or less likely to approach learning in a way that will lend itself to increasing our understanding, our progress, and our remuneration?

A number of factors deem to affect our agency and identity. The pressure to belong to a peer group, to construct an identity which is acceptable to one’s peers and to those leaders whom one wishes to follow cannot readily be discounted. In the presence of “peers who may be choosing different courses of action” (Jackson, 2003 p. 581), it is very difficult

(to) use correct English in front of others who are using slang or vernacular, b) attend to the teacher in front of others who are off-task, c) compete for high grades when others are refusing to compete, d) ask questions and seek help when others are rolling their eyes, e) sign up for academically difficult classes when friends are choosing easier courses, or f)

obey loosely enforced rules while others are ignoring them – without making a high-visibility statement of identity and risking being labeled as “not one of us” (or some more graphic phrase from the rich vocabulary of adolescents). (Jackson, 2003 p. 581-2)

Multiple factors, including gender, race, income, ethnic identification, family values and acceptance by peer groups may influence these decisions as, in Butler’s (1990) estimation, gender, and likely other aspects of the identity are “performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence.” Agency, then, becomes a complicated subject given the seen and unseen forces Jackson and Butler describe which affect it. One of the major goals of this research will be describe how participants perceived those forces in their own experience.

### **Identity from Within and Without**

The expression “You can take the boy out of the country but you can’t take the country out of the boy” provides an interesting jumping-off point with regard to the way thinkers view the genesis and maintenance of identity. In the general parlance, it is often taken to mean that although a person has relocated from a rural milieu to a more urban one, the essence of his bucolic past remains a key part of his being. It can also mean, however, that despite such a relocation, urban sophistication has failed to take root and the speaker is calling attention to an obdurate ‘backwardness’ which restricts the potential of the aforesaid boy in his new environment. Applied to the context of programs like AVID this notion can be additive, subtractive, or somewhere in between. Where on that spectrum an individual lands is something that can be explored through the performative lens of post-structuralist theories.

## **Identity and Intervention**

Socioeconomic status may be a major factor in whether, when, and how students pursue education, but another factor to consider is identity. From a Butlerian point of view, the identity develops constantly with input from the individual, her contemporaries and the past, present, and future of her society. College preparation, dropout prevention, and other programs intended to help those students considered widely to be ‘on the fence’ should, from that perspective, take into account the identity inputs and outputs of the individual and his context. Fashola and Slavin (1997), writing about programs which decreased the percentage of Latinx students dropping out of high school, found that while there are similarities between the socioeconomic indicators for Latinx and African-American students, the dropout rate for the Latinx population was considerably higher (30% compared to 12.6%) and more persistent over the years 1972 – 1994 than that of African-Americans. Even controlling for income, immigration, and language barriers, Latinx students experienced significantly higher dropout rates. Fashola and Slavin’s (1997) thesis holds that certain factors in Latino culture, specifically low engagement with schooling, a desire to participate in the working economy and the desire to start a family are major contributors to this phenomenon. They found that dropout prevention efforts, in place in one form or another since the 1950’s, had shifted toward a college preparation model with a focus on high achievement and university persistence and attendance. One aspect of this shift was an emphasis on developing the participants’ sense of themselves as intentional actors in their own schooling and as having academic power. They observed two major categories of program, dropout prevention and college preparation. This fits well with the growth of programs such as AVID and the rise of public charter schools noted in the mid-1990’s even if it lacks some nuance. In their analysis of the AVID program in San Diego in 1996, they found patterns among

students based on their junior high school test scores and class grades as well as the length of time they participated in AVID. Longer-term enrollees and those with higher test scores and grades predictably performed better but the trend was more striking among students whose scores were lower and those whose parents had not graduated high school. Overall, they found that AVID students had higher enrollment rates and that the program provided benefit to Latinx and non-Latinx students alike.

### **The Self**

From the earliest cave painting at Lascaux to the *cogito ergo sum* of René Descartes to the performativity of Judith Butler, humanity has sought not only to distinguish one individual from another but to understand what constitutes the individual and that person's place in society. Long seen as a tug-of-war between conscious cognition, agency, and influences exerted by and upon the wider world, the human self seems an almost infinitely malleable thing. If that is the case, then might it not be possible to shape nearly any human being into a form that can be called beneficial to the society in which it exists? Possible, yes, but the means by which to do so are devilish details indeed. For all the thought the post-structuralist theorists have put into the nature of the self, it has proven notably difficult to translate these findings into quotidian practice. Of course, most social contexts are not ideal petri dishes in which to culture widespread change but the secondary classroom is something of an exception. Given the nature of the relationships between the individuals present and involved in that setting, it is worth investigating not only how people have developed their own personalities but also how they view others as having influenced that process.

## **Summation**

In this chapter, the reform movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been discussed, along with an overview of the trends in research on AVID as well as similar and competing programs. An in-depth review of the elements comprising the AVID intervention model and the priorities inherent thereto shows the emphasis placed on an overall school-wide development of an AVID culture as well as some of the efforts involved in empowering adults within the school to guide that development and students to participate in it. Attention has been paid to the things AVID tries to inculcate to its participants as well as to the ways in which they have received it. Perhaps most relevant to the theoretical framework of the research, there has also been a discussion of the concepts of agency, identity, and the self in some historical context.

The following chapter will discuss the narrative inquiry methodology which will inform the research and the methods which will be used to apply a poststructuralist theoretical framework to the data collected during it. It will also discuss measures to be taken in order to recruit volunteer participants and to collect, analyze, and draw conclusions in a rigorous fashion.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Overview**

This work is a qualitative study using a narrative inquiry methodology seeking to understand the ways in which participants who were students in an AVID class in high school perceive their contact with the program to have influenced the ways in which they perform their identities in the Butlerian sense as they matriculated to and spent their first two or more years in higher education. Recognizing that individuals' perceptions and experiences going into an intervention program influence what they take away from it, this research takes data from interview and participant conversation transcripts as well as written responses to questions and analyzes it through the lens of poststructuralist theories, in particular that of Judith Butler, and provides a synthesis of themes emerging from the data surrounding the participants' use of their AVID classes, experience in university study, and related events as their identities develop as a result of both their own agency and the expectations of the life-worlds they inhabit.

#### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this post-structuralist theoretical study of the experiences of students who participated in AVID and completed at least two years of college is to examine the change or lack of change in how they performed their identities during the matriculation process and their first two years of college. I investigated how and whether what AVID is doing does what its proponents and implementers believe it is doing. It may be that AVID is changing the

lives it impacts by teaching students to think of themselves as college bound or it may be that the statistics compiled by AVID are skewed and the impact is less meaningful than the numbers would suggest. I also wish to describe in depth the ways in which AVID alumni are taking the lessons and experiences in AVID class and translating it to the higher education context.

### **Research Question**

The question I investigated through the current research is as follows: How do college students who have completed two years of post-secondary education perceive AVID to have influenced the way they perform their identities as learners and as members of their cultural group?

### **Participants**

For this work, I recruited five participants who took part in an AVID program during their high school (grades 9-12) careers. When recruiting participants, I relied initially on my connections among teachers and students in the AVID program and those associated with it for assistance in the recruitment process. Students enroll in AVID as an elective and are free to leave it at the end of any semester they choose. It is ordinarily available to students from sixth through twelfth grade and there is a wide variety in terms of time of attendance. My view is that students at all levels of AVID participation have something worthwhile to add to the conversation around what they took away from their involvement in the program but that high school participants have the most relevant experience in the sense of college matriculation and persistence. These participants have all graduated high school and gone on to complete at least two years of study at the community college or university level somewhere in the United States. They were recommended to me via snowball sampling through a network of AVID teachers, school administrators, and participants themselves.

This was a purposive sampling in that any potential participant who met the aforementioned qualifications and wished to take part in the study was considered suitable. I considered students who had completed four or more semesters to be preferable in that they would likely have had more time, in the form of summer or intersession break(s) in which to reflect on the factors that play a role in their identity performance. While I was hopeful that many participants would prove willing and suited to take part in the research, I was not unmindful of the value of a smaller, less selective sample (van Manen, 1996). In the event, the five participants I recruited proved to have had perspectives very much in line with the vision of the current work.

Participants were enrolled in AVID as an elective for no less than one full academic year in high school and at least two years of university study. The objective in choosing participants was to be able to interview people who have both experienced the AVID program and who have made the transition to higher education as the research goal is to understand the ways students perceive AVID to have influenced the way they perform their identities as students. The participants all had some link to an AVID teacher or administrator or to a fellow AVID alumnus but I believe that the connections were tenuous enough to prevent any significant misleading pattern from emerging in the data.

Diversity of student experiences was also a consideration for my research. I chose participants from varied socioeconomic and racial/ethnic/nationality backgrounds for the sake of richer data. AVID markets its program to schools which serve a variety of students and does not design its curriculum for any particular demographic group (AVID, 2013c). Therefore, it was to be expected that members of diverse socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and nationality communities would be available. It is perhaps worth noting, however, that this research seeks to analyze and

draw conclusions about the influences the participants perceive from their time in AVID in a qualitative way without seeking to control for demographic factors.

A preferred participant, then, was someone who took the AVID elective class in high school and had completed four or more semesters of higher education. As a group, my participants did have things in common while simultaneously bringing a wide array of perspectives from different times, places and interests. While diverse participants would have useful data to share and while the tenets of poststructuralist thought and the ideas of performativity would allow for useful insights to be drawn, it seems possible to accomplish the goals of the current research with a relatively homogeneous sample. That my participants were a mix of the two characteristics (homogeneity and diversity) has served me well in the data analysis portion of this work. Indeed, it has been said (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012) that “it is inappropriate to think in terms of random or representative sampling when one is interviewing so few participants” (p. 364). Therefore, while some potential participants’ viewpoints might have better addressed the research question, in the spirit of qualitative inquiry it seems that any qualifying participant would be able to offer some insight into the matter.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this research has been collected through semi-structured individual interviews taking place either in person or via an online platform such as Skype or FaceTime. Questions (see appendices A-C) were posed to participants and follow up questions were asked as needed and relevant. The questions are open-ended and were not met with any binary yes or no answers. In the event one had been offered, the question could have been rephrased so as to elicit a more nuanced response or followed up with a clarifying or focusing question but in the event, this proved not to be necessary. The interviews were conducted according to the protocol but leaving

space for participants to describe their lived experiences richly. Interviews lasted approximately one hour during which a series of questions relating to the perception of her or his background, upbringing, views on education at the primary, secondary, undergraduate and graduate levels as well as their experiences in the AVID program and what AVID meant to them as they made their way through secondary school, the matriculation process, and their first two years of undergraduate study. Questions also covered the things students have done to progress through the academic system. Specifically, I was interested in the ways in which students modified or noticed modifications in the ways they went about their jobs, so to speak, as students. Did they find any difference between the way they did school before they took part in AVID versus their work during and after their participation in the program? How did the things they learned about academic study and cognitive processing in the AVID program interact with what they already knew and what they experienced from day to day in and outside their classes?

As an accompaniment to the individual interviews, I had hoped to conduct a focus group with as many of the participants as possible in order to spark the sort of interactions that can bring for new recollections or reinforce those already mentioned. To my thinking, a group of three to all five participants would have been ideal but given the diverse locations and undertakings of the participants, I was only able to convene a group of two, Isabel and Andrew, at the student union of the university where they were both enrolled. In light of the smaller number, I prefer to think of the encounter more as a participant conversation than as a focus group. As things turned out, it was in fact more of a conversation between Andrew and Isabel with both informing me while I largely asked and followed up on questions I had. The benefit of this, to my thinking, is that by not inserting my perspective or that of participants not involved in this conversation, the interlocutors were free to engage substantively with the recollections and

perspectives they were most familiar with. Rather than attempting to divine the meaning of strangers, they could explicate their own. When proposing the present research, it had not occurred to me to use this type of data gathering but having experienced it and analyzed the data gained thereby, it occurs to me that this sort of participant conversation might be useful either in place of or as an adjunct to the use of focus groups.

In addition to these exchanges, follow-up emails and text messages were exchanged when the participants or I felt there was more information to be offered through further questions or discussion of previous data. Prior to final analysis of the data, I undertook member checking to share my preliminary findings with the pertinent members and ensure that I have understood their meaning as they intended it and have related their viewpoints fairly and accurately. Participants have had the opportunity to speak with or write to me to help me better understand their experience and the majority of them have done so.

### **Data Analysis**

Because the premise behind this study rests on a post-positivist, poststructuralist foundation, analysis of the data for this study will, of theoretical necessity, need to move beyond the dichotomies of student and teacher, participant and program (AVID), successful and unsuccessful. It is not enough to shunt the formation of the nascent identity into the category of ‘student’ or ‘dropout’, ‘academic success’ or ‘academic failure.’ As the participants in the research moved into self-awareness and began to measure the skills and values they were observing against their own personal definitions of success and what was necessary to be successful, they considered more than whether or not to adopt a given attitude. They also considered when, where, why, and how to adopt it. Their identity formation process, then,

cannot be divorced from the context in which it took place. This is why these narratives are so important to understanding how AVID may have influenced or not influenced these people.

The inside, however, is not the only perspective deemed relevant in poststructuralist thinking. A significant component of Butler's thought on performativity is the idea that identity is not altogether a construct of the self (Butler, 1990, 2015b). Just as performatives may be recognized by the one instituting them or they may not, identity formation takes place within the context of a bounding society the mores of which are interwoven with the value-making decisions taking place both on a moment-to-moment scale and on a broader, more systemic scale. Because there is more than one locus of control, it is important to analyze data such as these not only in the sense of interpreting how the agent develops as a doer but also how the reciprocal influences of self, society and institution. Informing that analysis is the narrative inquiry method proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Inasmuch as narrative inquiry seeks to make sense of lived experience by weaving it into a larger narrative that has space for the many and varied influences envisioned in many threads of poststructuralist thought, the analysis of the data provided by participants uses Foucault's (2006) and Butler's (2015b) ideas of a multiplicity of influences combining to create a narrative. In light of this complexity, analysis needed to be multifocal and allow for the emergence of themes across data sources. Clandinin and Connelly address this need by acknowledging that life is "filled with narrative fragments enacted in storied moments of time and space and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities." (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000 p. 17) They view narrative inquiry as a relationship between researcher and participant(s) wherein the former uses the narrated experience of the latter to understand an experience, in this case the journey from uncertain academic novitiate to determined, striving young adult engaged in the pursuit of an

undergraduate degree. They consider education an experience, as do I, and by probing and interpreting narratives of that experience and then offering explanations and reflecting on them, we seek to understand the path participants have taken and the things they have seen along the way. Their approach to narrative involves a “*three dimensional narrative inquiry space*” (2000, p. 49, emphasis in the original), the dimensions of which could be thought of as the inner/outer behavior of the individuality (personal and social), the passage of time (continuity) and the influences of the places and spaces where experience as related by narrative takes place (situation). When designing the method and carrying out the collection and analysis of the data collected in this research, it became more and more clear that the theoretical jumping off point was the idea that the essential identity is a construct produced by the multitudinous interactions of one’s own desires and intentions and the expectations and schema imposed by the society in which one exists. Therefore, a need existed for an analysis which could take in those numerous influences and describe the participants’ narratives in terms that comport with the central premise that identity is fundamentally a series of performative acts.

Another take on the notion of the self that informs the analysis of these participants’ narratives is that suggested by Donald Polkinghorne who refutes challenges to his view of narrative analysis that “the self is simply an artifact of some cultures” (Polkinghorne, 2000 p. 265). Other scholars have attempted to posit the existence of a sort of bedrock, a “permanence within change” (p. 266) but Polkinghorne believes that the influence of culture is such a powerful shaper of epistemology that anything we could call an elemental self would be buried so deeply within layers of influence as not to bear any intelligible influence itself. He writes, after musing on the ability of major social institutions such as science and religion to be used for varying iterations of good and harm that “This implication can be extended to the view that

humans have no essential properties and instead are completely malleable objects.” (p. 267) It would be inaccurate, I believe, to suggest that the identity is completely unmoored and that it forms and reforms in ways either completely controlled or completely uncontrolled. As Derrida (1978) saw it, there is rather an acknowledgement that desires and influences edge into one another’s space while simultaneously holding one another back.

This ebb and flow of desire and influence, movement and inertia, old narratives becoming new narratives being made over into yet newer narratives lies at the heart of the educational experience. While we certainly do teach content and while proficiency demands knowledge and adherence to standards, these standards have evolved over time and continue to evolve. Just as in language there is no immutable meaning, only what groups of people attach to it, in the language of performativity, there is no immutable self standing for or against society. Instead, there is a constant push and pull between what these participants know, what they want, and the milieu in which all this takes place. In short, a three dimensional space in the vein of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). While interpreting these narratives I have examined the three dimensions of the narratives and develop themes which seem to indicate a process of change taking place in the participants’ view of themselves and the actions they take which their perceptions tie back to their experience in AVID.

In light of these concepts, priorities and concerns, I approached the data analysis through a process of coding (Saldaña, 2009) wherein I first identified concepts expressed by participants as data points through open coding, simply reading the data and marking it with descriptive codes, some of which were *a priori*, as when considering suggestions of performative acts. After this, I began to group coded pieces of data into notions that, whether appearing only once or repeatedly, seemed to be significant in describing the participant’s narrative as it proceeded.

When all data had been open and then hierarchically coded, I began to compare data from multiple sources (interview, participant conversation, email) to identify trends and contradictions. Upon identifying trends, I began to propose themes which I then tied to individual pieces or groups of data for support. Once themes emerged and data began to repeat themselves, I felt confident that the theme could fairly be said to exist in the data. I used triangulation of sources along with theoretical triangulation and member checks to promote trustworthiness.

### **Rigor and Trustworthiness**

Further analysis from a narrative inquiry point of view will attempt to address and make sense of the external forces that shape participants’ perceptions of their experiences and their responses to the society in which those experiences occurred. In an effort to ensure that standard criteria for trustworthiness have been considered and met, the following measures have been taken.

Table 1: Trustworthiness Measures

Criteria	Examples	Used in Study
Credibility – The research methods are connected to reality and theory.	Methods Triangulation	Yes
	Triangulation of Sources	Yes
	Theoretical Triangulation	Yes
	Member Checking	Yes
	Analyst Triangulation	No
Transferability – The research findings may be applicable to other contexts.	Thick Description	Yes
Dependability – The research findings tie to the data and another researcher, looking at the data, would reach similar conclusions.	Methodology	Yes
	Audit Trail	Yes
Confirmability – The research findings are based on the data rather than the researchers biases.	Audit Trail	Yes
	Reflexivity	Yes

Lincoln and Guba (1985) devote the final chapter of their book *Naturalistic Inquiry* to the matter of data reporting and developing trust and rigor through member checking and an audit trail. Among their suggestions, they recommend asking whether there are “errors of fact or interpretation” and whether “...writer interpretations (have) been erroneously portrayed as interpretations proffered by respondents” (p. 371) in checking drafts of the final report. These suggestions are followed in writing about the conclusions I have reached during data analysis. They also offer steps for conducting member checks including the presentation of draft findings to participants and meeting with participants to discuss the way their recollection of their lived experience was understood and interpreted. This method of improving trustworthiness appears to have value in determining the content of the final draft of my conclusions and has been, as appropriate and applicable, used with my participants. In an effort to ensure that members’ original words are able to be verified and re-read or replayed in order to utilize data effectively, an audit trail has been maintained in the form of sound files of all interviews in their entirety and a digital copy of all transcripts on a password protected computer system and a hard copy thereof in a locked, fireproof strong box.

In addition to the study’s goals and design, data collection and analysis, its utility should be considered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The usefulness of this research lies in what stands to be gained from learning about the ways in which an external influence (the AVID elective course and the interactions inherent in participation therein) shapes a participant’s experience as she or he makes the transition from high school to higher education and negotiates the first two years’ experiences. My intent in designing and conducting this research is to better understand and to elucidate for the reader the ways in which Judith Butler’s (1990) notion that aspects of the identity are consciously and unconsciously performed by the individual can be used to describe

the ways in which students in the academic middle in terms of grade point average, socioeconomic status, and support mechanisms utilize the lessons imparted by the AVID elective course and its concomitant relationships.

Feasibility and propriety are two further aspects of research design which contribute to the rigor and trustworthiness of the study. With respect to the former, the research relies on pre-existing relationships that I have with local teachers who are a part of the AVID program in their schools and/or teachers whose students in other courses have also participated in AVID. Through those relationships, I was able to recruit students by beginning with opportunistic sampling and moving on to a snowball approach. That is to say that the first participants were recruited through their ongoing relationship, however tangential, with someone from their former high school. As recruitment went on, potential participants were asked to refer others to the researcher for possible inclusion in the study. While this resulted in a small number of referrals who went on to become participants, the relatively small group of participants needed for this research ( $n = 5$ ) was achievable through word-of-mouth recruitment. As regards the propriety of the study, it was conducted using adults who have completed at least two years of college or university study, which eliminated some of the concerns which arise with more vulnerable populations such as current secondary students or newcomers to higher education. In order to further fortify the propriety of the study, participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the risks, benefits, and voluntary nature of participation in the research. Such an explanation took a form approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As with any research, ethical considerations are at the forefront of the considerations that went into planning. Understanding that participants are real people who may have undergone

significant trauma in the course of their progression through secondary and higher education, there has been a concerted effort to ensure that candidates for participation did so of their own volition and that they were thoroughly informed not only of the voluntary nature of participation but also of the absence of any disincentive other than work unfinished to leaving the project. It was also made clear to participants that their contributions will be treated with respect and will be used to further the academic understanding of identity development in young people whose experiences parallel their own.

This approach seems to comport with the principles set forth in the Belmont Report (United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979), the United States government's published guidance on the protection of human subjects who participate in research in the biomedical and behavioral sciences. It emphasizes "respect for persons", "beneficence", and "justice", three concepts which are essential to the ethical conduct of research and which are being taken into account in the recruitment of participants in the research.

In addition to the importance of ensuring that participants are able to join and depart the study freely and placing their well-being above the researcher's desire to add to our understanding of a phenomenon, it is worth noting that the researcher will play an interpretive role in the analysis of the data gained in the process of the research. As a human science, hermeneutic phenomenology collects and analyzes data with an eye toward interpreting and representing participants' experiences (van Manen, 1996) and narrative inquiry seeks to understand such phenomena as participants fit themselves into a narrative. As such, care has been taken to discuss findings with participants in order to ensure that they have input into my interpretation and representation of their experiences.

## **Researcher Subjectivity**

The role of the researcher in a study such as this is significant as it is the researcher who interprets the intentions of the participants and relates them to the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Indeed, while the participant is the one who provides the indispensable raw material for such an undertaking in the form of his or her story, the researcher must understand not only the inherent core of that story but also his relationship both to the participants and to the paradigms (Kafle, 2011) he and they bring to the work. That being the case, it may be of benefit for a researcher to situate readers in his own paradigm at the outset of the research.

By way of insight into my orientation to the research, I will recount the dawning of my critical consciousness with regard to race and class and how it has affected my pedagogical and scholarly practice since.

I knew growing up that I was 3/8 Choctaw and Creek but all that meant to me is that my grandmother occasionally gave us a block of yellow, plastic ‘commodity’ cheese or a number ten can of peanuts. Being almost completely ignorant of my culture, I saw myself in the center (Spivak, 1988). This was my outlook when, during the summer after finishing high school, I received a scholarship to attend a summer internship program for Native youth at the Colorado School of Mines (CSM) in Golden, Colorado.

When I arrived nothing seemed likely to shake my worldview. I met my roommate, a Ute Mountain Ute from near Durango, in southeast Colorado. Having had brown-skinned relatives all my life, I did not think much of his appearance but I did notice his accent. He told me it was a “rez” accent and that all “rez” Indians had it (C. Knight, personal communication, June, 1991). While vaguely aware of Indian reservations, I was almost totally ignorant of the conditions there. Over the course of the next few days, I met the other fifteen participants in the

program and my roommate was correct. Of the sixteen of us, three had grown up in the suburbs and the remaining thirteen had grown up in places like the Ute Mountain reservation in Colorado, the Lakota reservation in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, and the Navajo reservations of New Mexico and Arizona.

Hoffman, Jackson, and Smith write in their article “Career barriers among Native American students living on reservations” (2005) that (p)atterns of educational achievement and employment among Native Americans indicate that this population faces considerable barriers to education and career development. There is a hopelessness there that rivals anything found elsewhere. There is a desperation, a sense that life has no purpose other than to be endured and escaped when and as possible, that pervades the entire society. A few notable exceptions exist but even those who escape the cycle of grinding generational poverty and substance abuse often find themselves drawn back to the family that those on the reservation (or “rez”) constitute. Ira Hayes, one of the heroes of Iwo Jima, is an instructive example (Nelson, 2002). Among the Marines who fought their way to the top of that hotly contested rock in the Pacific Ocean; Hayes was one of the men depicted in the second, more famous picture of the raising of the United States’ flag. He stands at the rear of the group, reaching for the flagpole. He became a hero on his return to the United States but soon fell back into the all-too-common pattern on many reservations (Hoffman et al., 2005) of drinking, fighting, and being locked up. Between what he had seen on Iwo Jima and what he lived every day on the Pima reservation, he lost his fight with alcohol and was found dead of exposure in an irrigation ditch within ten years of the end of the war.

One of the goals of the summer program was to teach young men and women who had grown up on the reservation how to adjust to life in the white world. All you can eat meals,

looking out for your own interests without any elders guiding you and learning to go along with the power structure until you had your degree were skills that needed to be taught to these thirteen “rez kids.” At first, I looked down on my comrades because of their traditional ways and they held a dim view of my lack of tradition. Perhaps in the interest of shifting participants’ views of one another, the organizers of the program had included an Outward Bound wilderness course during the first three days of the experience. Bonding over both natural and contrived challenges, we learned to trust, respect and understand each other in short order. I quickly went from being the suburban kid who had it all going for himself to playing second fiddle to people who knew how to establish a community and share the resources we had in common. While my leadership was welcome, I also learned to listen and to do things the Indian way. It was during this trip that I became an Indian culturally as well as biologically. While there are myriad tribal differences and even a few antagonisms (C. Knight, personal communication, July, 1991), in general the tribes have learned to overcome traditional enmities and work together to improve their economic and social positions.

Another of the activities sponsored by local Native American groups to keep homesick youths in the program was a trip to a powwow that was being held at the nearby Denver zoo, followed by a picnic in a city park. I attended, along with my Ute roommate, a black friend, a Latino friend, an Anglo friend, an Asian friend as well as the other students in the program. We had just watched the girls’ jingle dress competition, wherein girls in dresses festooned with scores of metal Copenhagen brand chewing tobacco can lids, each beaten into a cone and sewed to their dresses so that the lids jingled with their movement, danced. Other dancers and participants, many of them teenagers, in polished bone armor, animal hide clothing, and porcupine quill headdresses were wandering the park as well.

As my friends and I stood near an exhibit we overheard a group of white teenage park visitors commenting on the appearance of those in traditional dress in an uncomplimentary fashion. For the first time in my life, I was on the wrong side of racism. We outnumbered them and I was all in favor of delivering a lesson on the value of diversity but my comrades talked me out of it. They said the only likely result would be that law enforcement would come and arrest us regardless of who started the fight. I actually had to ask why us when they had obviously been in the wrong. My friends were compassionate but firm in explaining their experience of what happens when non-whites encounter law enforcement.

This was truly a pivotal moment for me and one that has changed the trajectory of my life ever since. Things did not change *in* that instant but *because of* it. After the summer ended, I enrolled as a freshman at Oklahoma State University. I joined a fraternity and, as in many college fraternities, racism was endemic. It was during this time that the consciousness that had been awakened in me over the summer caused me to begin asking pointed questions of myself even as I participated in the behavior.

The next year, I found work at a shoe and apparel retailer. I worked in the men's shoe department with a black man in his sixties who was semi-retired from the insurance industry. Retail workers find plenty of opportunity for conversation among themselves in between customers most times of the year. My co-worker had been born and raised in a historically black community in south-central Oklahoma and his stories of his early life helped me both to focus and broaden my understanding of class and race.

He was intent on helping me understand not only who he and his fellow blacks were (to the extent that such a group can be designated as monolithic), but my own role as a non-white member of society who can "pass" (D.L. Hooks, personal communication, March, 1993). He all

but forced me to touch his relaxed and treated hair to emphasize the bond of humanity between us. He taught me elements of black culture from the influence of preachers to the importance of women's hats to the supposed fact that every black man over fifty years of age at that time owned a pair of Stacy Adams brand "biscuit toe" shoes, so called because the cap toe was to be polished with a stale biscuit for maximum brilliance. How many of these stories were apocryphal, I will never know, but I do know that on those lazy weekday afternoons in the shoe store, I developed an appreciation for his culture that led me to embracing my own and understanding that there was significantly more to the question of identity and power than I had heretofore thought.

In my case, the learning of culture was reversed from the case of most minority students. I was raised white and became an Indian as a young adult. Many children are raised black, Latinx, Asian, Native, or otherwise first and learn what Paulo Freire called "the dominant syntax" (Literacy dot org, 2009), until much later in life if at all. They can be said to lack the institutional privilege (Johnson, 2006) I always enjoyed. Many in education have recognized this problem and one group attempting to address it is Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). I have heard numerous testimonials to its efficacy but I am interested in learning how the program looks from the point of view of the students enrolled in it.

## **Summary**

In summation, I arrived at the idea for the research via a route that began in a partial understanding of identity and has progressed over the decades. I formed my identity through countless influences both intentional and unintentional on the part of countless people with whom my path has intersected. I find myself curious about the ways other people experience their identities and what influences informed them. If, in the tradition of narrative inquiry and

hermeneutic phenomenology, I am able to collect and interpret those experiences through the lens of poststructuralist performativity, I believe the cause of understanding in the field of human sciences will be advanced.

Through the use of a narrative inquiry methodology, in the sense of seeing lived experiences as a “three-dimensional space” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 54) and a method of hermeneutic phenomenology in the mode of Husserl and Heidegger and as expanded upon and refined by van Manen, the research will gather data through the use of semi-structured interviews with appropriately chosen volunteer participants and analyze it in order to produce insight of value in the teaching and guidance of secondary and college or university students.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

In the introduction to her 2004 book *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler (2004) takes on the notion of characteristics as being both given by the action of the agent and those received, perhaps inherited from the society in which the agent exists. She writes:

If I have any social agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of possibility. (p. 3)

This idea of agency and the paradoxes surrounding it lie, in my view, near the intersection of identity formation and dynamics of power that shape individuals' efforts to define themselves in relation to other agents and to institutions in their world. The participants I spoke to for the current research each faced the task of creating an identity for themselves that would need to interact with multiple ways of being in the hope of maintaining connections from their early lives while simultaneously enabling them to reach beyond those early influences into a world where they could be empowered to fulfill their roles in fields of endeavor they found rewarding both economically and personally.

This challenge, this seeming paradox around creating an identity as a learner and as one who is both influenced and who influences the world, is very familiar to me having grown up with a father whose life story involved loosening ties willingly with the loved ones of his youth in order to pursue what he considered a more successful path, which is to say one that led to the

respect and acclaim of the white business world of the 1960s and 1970s. Through my reading and research, I have been able to understand this creation process in terms that can be described through a poststructuralist, Butlerian theoretical framework. My interviews with participants have given me insight and evidence of the conscious and unconscious formation of the identity in line with the theory of performativity advanced by Butler and informed by theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva.

In this chapter, I will briefly recapitulate an understanding of performativity and identity formation as well as the terms of my interview protocols and a description of my participants. I will also outline my method of data analysis and the conclusions I have reached as I have analyzed the data provided by my participants. Strengths and areas for growth in the research design will be considered and finally, I will draw an outline of my conclusions and suggest ways forward in research and practice.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Interviewing Butler for *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* May, 1997 edition, Liz McMillen wrote:

In *Gender Trouble*, Dr. Butler's approach was to question the very categories of gender, sex, and sexuality, using philosophical thinking to show that there is no easy or natural relationship among them. In effect, she "troubled" these categories, raising questions about the nature and limits of identity.

She argued that gender is a set of behaviors that are constantly performed and repeated; hence the idea of "performativity." "All gender roles are an imitation for which there is no original," she writes, pointing to drag as an example of the artificiality of gender categories. (p. A14)

## **Analysis Process and Product**

When Clandinin and Connelly (2000) set forth their thoughts on data analysis in narrative inquiry, they consider the shift from the narrative present in field texts, transcripts of recorded conversations and emails in the case of the current research, to their representation by a rich, detailed three dimensional narrative that connects to theory yet is not shut off from nuance by it. If, as Clandinin and Connelly maintain (2000, p. 145), the task of narrative inquiry is “to write about people, places and things as *becoming* rather than *being*” (emphasis in the original) and to make clear that while “they have a narrative history”, they are also “moving forward”. It was in light of the importance of telling the whole story of where the participants were at different points in their narrative that I developed the analytical process used for this work.

In keeping with Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I began with relatively straightforward archiving of the data. Recordings became transcripts and the email exchanges were printed off and added to the collection. From there, it was necessary to read and re-read the data to begin to decide into what further categories I might separate, combine and recombine participant experiences in order to support a finding, which in this case is really closer to a story than an axiom. As this process unfolded, I began to notice what I came to think of as commonalities, outliers, and trends that came together to form themes. Commonalities could be described as experiences or actions observed across participants whereas outliers included both singularly observed points and data which contradicted either another participant’s response or, at times, a participant’s own response to a different question. Trends were a kind of urthemes, a primitive, apparent but not yet adequately supported theme. As data analysis continued, I was able to tie specific data points to these urthemes in order to flesh them out as well as to support them.

While some qualitative methods look for highly specific coding of data points and clearly delineated themes, narrative inquiry privileges “questions of meaning and social significance” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 131). With this in mind, and in connection with the perspective of Butler and Foucault, I focused on making holistic associations between one part of the data and others that seemed to support the same conclusion with regard to the telling of the participants’ larger narrative. Because, within the theoretical framework of this research, it is believed that all parties involved are being acted upon by internal and external, conscious and unconscious forces and act in turn upon them, a narrow tally of the number of times a thought or behavior was mentioned would fail to render the image of the findings with sufficient fidelity to the cause undertaken. Therefore, in terms of a product, a ‘finding’, what emerges is a set of themes supported by data that is rendered as a narrative description of the participants’ lived experience as it was recalled during the data collection.

### **Participants**

For the purpose of the current research, I was looking for students who may have been similarly situated but in a different context, that of academic identity. Through purposive sampling, I wished to assemble a group of participants who had not only participated in AVID but had also had experience applying its lessons to their multiple facets of their lives. I wanted, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe, to find myself in the middle of the three-dimensional space that was their lives as students. I wanted to situate myself as observer and interpreter while they described their past, present and future. This meant that purposive sampling of students who were living this kind of experience were, had been, and would continue to experience intersections with their takeaways from their time in AVID. Using interview, participant conversation and email questioning protocols, I asked them to narrate aspects of their

experience with space for them to interject their thoughts independently of my guidance of the conversation. After gathering this data, all oral interviews were transcribed and, combined with the text of email interactions, were analyzed for emerging themes across participants and modes of collecting data.

When I began recruiting participants, I was referred from one AVID teacher to another and put into contact with a group of four women and one man who had all been through the AVID program for between one and six years and had all completed at least two years of study in higher education. In two cases, the participants were due to graduate from university within weeks of our interview. As I have analyzed the data they provided, I have sought, in the style of Butler, to question some of the seemingly fixed attributes of my participants. All were people of color, Hispanic or Asian. One came from a comprehensive high school in one of the largest school districts in Texas, the great majority of whose students are African-American, Hispanic or Asian. Three others came from schools situated in suburban areas far from the city center but still within the larger agglomeration of the metro area. The student populations there are much more white and middle class to affluent.

All were in their early twenties and were the first in their families to attend an institution of higher learning. As their stories unfolded, however, I was able to discern differences in the ways their home and school experiences had interacted with their own concepts of who they were in a way that, viewed through the lens of performative acts, suggested not only a series of conscious and unconscious performances but also the evolution of a series of new definitions of the self that developed as they made the transition from pre-AVID to higher education.

Table 2: Participants

Name	Age	College	Years in AVID	High School Type
Michael	20	Junior	6	Suburban
Tien	20	Junior	1	Suburban
Isabel	22	Senior	4	Suburban
Andrew	21	Senior	4	Urban
Dahlia	21	Junior	6	Suburban

### **Michael**

My first interview was with Michael (all participant names and school affiliations are pseudonymous), a junior at a large regional university in northern Texas. She was an alumna of one of the large suburban high schools which are common in the greater Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. She described her AVID classmates as “outgoing” and “go-getters” who had been selected by school personnel for their “potential” and had interviewed for a spot in the class. In her telling, the objective of the course was to improve a student’s ability to perform in an academic context, first at the high school and later at the post-secondary level. She noted a particular but not exclusive focus on preparing first-generation students for college attendance and was first-generation herself.

In discussing the influences AVID had on her, she saw differences in the way she conducted herself as an individual, as a collaborator, and as a student. She began with AVID’s practice of teaching students to use Cornell notes, a system which involves writing information in one’s own words on the right side of a page and one’s questions on the left as a means of enforcing academic diligence as well as critical thinking. She also described binder and

backpack checks wherein those items of school equipment are to be kept with military precision and rigidity and students are held accountable for their contents and conditions weekly. She and other participants spoke of resenting the imposition early in their time in AVID but seeing the value of it over time and becoming converts by the end of their time. Multiple participants continued to practice similar vigilance over their organizational methods even as they approached graduation from college.

A corollary practice to the Cornell notes described by Michael was the tutorial request form. In her AVID class, tutors were hired from local college students, some of whom had been AVID students previously, to come to school and assist students in resolving their academic issues. Prior to tutoring sessions, students were expected to fill out the request form for the tutor and for their classmates detailing, to the best of their ability, the nature of their conundrum as well as what measures they had taken toward resolving it themselves. During the tutoring sessions, which took place twice weekly, the form would be presented to a tutoring group of four to six students and a tutor in the discipline. The tutor's function was, in Michael's telling, to help the group collaborate on a solution and to offer content-specific guidance when and as needed. According to Michael, the process reinforced for her the relative importance of the process of seeking a solution as compared to having the solution in hand.

Another trend that emerged in Michael's takeaway from the AVID program had to do with the notion of competition. Michael wanted to make clear that while her AVID class was collaborative and she had open relationships with her classmates, there was a definite element of competition with the previous year's crop of graduates. Metrics like the number of students admitted to college and the class's total dollar amount of scholarships were measured against the standard set by recent graduates. Behind the competition, however, lay a rationale: the

importance of advocating for oneself. Michael's AVID teacher emphasized the need to "stand out" by staying in contact with people in authority and by participating in class and attending office hours. It was in this way, they were taught, that they would be prominent in the minds of the staff and faculty with whom they interacted and that prominence could lead to opportunities that a less outgoing student might miss.

Michael described herself at the beginning of her AVID experience as a "shy puppy" but through the family atmosphere generated in her AVID class, she gained confidence and an appreciation for the need to make an impression. She describes "Socratic seminars," an AVID practice involving marking a text and advancing questions and positions based on textual evidence in order to persuade colleagues of a position. The technique requires participants to employ tenacity, compassion and intellectual rigor to arrive at a consensus about the meaning and implications of the text. Having participated in such seminars myself and seen the way participants' behavior has shifted from beginning to end, it strikes me as plausible that this technique does indeed influence the conscious aspect of performative acts.

Like other participants, Michael's family lacked a college-going tradition and, along with it, much knowledge about the process of preparing for, admission to and persistence in higher education. Although many of her family members were veterans or members of the United States Army, their understanding of higher education was limited to the idea that if one serves in the military, money will be available to pay for tuition and books. When Michael decided against military service, her AVID class became even more significant as a source of the cultural capital she would need to pursue her academic goals. Michael relates:

“Like from my parents, they didn’t really tell me anything about college. Like, they never told me ‘Did you apply for, you know, did you apply for college?’ They didn’t tell me anything. So AVID is what got me into college.”

Once in college, she credits AVID for giving her both the awareness of the importance of speaking to her professors as well as the confidence to do so.

Returning to the idea of her AVID class resembling a family, Michael spoke at some length about her relationships with members of her class and the sense of support, belonging and understanding she perceived. She noted that, like siblings, class members would get along better with some than with others and that good-natured ribbing was common. She also noted the presence of a shared sense of purpose, specifically going to college, that she did not find with friends not in AVID or with her biological family. Where others were more interested in prosaic matters, fellow AVID students offered their thoughts on which high school classes would be best to take and which colleges made the most sense in the context of what the student could and wanted to do. They also formed a sort of accountability safety net. One student who was perceived to be capable of university study decided she would instead attend community college. The class, including the AVID teacher and another AVID teacher for whom the young lady worked as a tutor, persuaded her to set her sights on a four-year university out of state. The results of that decision have been mixed but Michael felt confident that she had done the right thing in encouraging her classmate to reach beyond the comfortable and familiar.

Of importance to Michael was not only the attitude of the AVID students toward one another but the genuine sense of caring she described feeling from the teacher. Michael considered her “the backbone of our AVID class” in the sense that she was not willing to let a

student settle for poor or no effort, be it on an assignment, in a class or in the process of applying for admission or scholarships.

A recurring notion that is repeated throughout Michael's experience is the importance of the relationships in the class to the development of the personality and along with it the identity. She speaks of another student who blossomed from timidity into self-advocacy due, in her view, to the efforts of the teacher to coax her to participate and take chances and to the class's insistence that not only could she but she must live up to her ability as a student. While not part of the AVID curriculum per se, these "side comments" were a meaningful element of developing individuals and the class/family group.

In discussing the transition from high school to college and the challenges inherent therein, Michael thought primarily of logistical and financial hurdles. In pursuing the topic of academic challenges, she maintained that her college coursework through her first two years had been rather manageable. She said "It's hard to pay for books and – but other than that, I thought college was – college is pretty straightforward. Go to class. You study." That being said, she also held some of her university classmates in low esteem due to their lack of seriousness. According to Michael, they are "...like just way behind. They're not on top of their stuff. They don't care as much. I think that their life is like that because Mommy and Daddy are paying for college. I've got, like, to hustle."

As an AVID tutor herself, an experience shared by three other participants, Michael came to appreciate the amount of thought and work that went into creating the AVID experience and expressed both gratitude for her experience and a slight sense of regret at not having more powerfully conveyed her appreciation for the work, academic and otherwise, her AVID teacher had done. As she put it, she thought she should have sent her teacher flowers and a note

thanking her for all the recommendations, which garnered her numerous scholarships. I would submit that another flower arrangement might have been in order to acknowledge the elements of Michael's identity that took shape during her time in AVID and thereafter as a result of her experience.

## **Tien**

Tien is a young woman in her early twenties. She attends a regional public university in the North Texas region and is in her third year of study. She took AVID during her senior year at the same high school as Michael. Indeed, the same teacher introduced me to both women. Tien was born in Ho Chi Minh City, Socialist Republic of Vietnam. She immigrated with her parents to the United States when she was fourteen years old. As she remembers it, she was rather well known in her largely white high school as "the only Asian kid." While she spoke some English upon arrival as a result of her studies in Vietnam, she still had much to learn both in terms of language and culture. She joined the AVID program at her high school during her senior year, when, she says, many of her classmates had already formed cliques along ethnic lines. As "the only Asian kid," she reports that she was not rejected outright but that between her newcomer status, her lack of a smartphone, and the cultural differences between her and her classmates, neither was she ever completely as completely a part of the social unit as others seemed to be. She describes occupying a somewhat liminal space, wherein she felt loved and accepted but aware of a "division" in the class. "They're very close," she said "but not to me."

Tien finds herself possessed of at least two identities. She reports having friends still in Vietnam as well as the friends she made in AVID class but that the two do not commingle. She feels she would find it too difficult to bridge the gap in understanding between them as the two perspectives are "two different worlds." She also found herself unable to share everything she

might have liked to share with her parents as a result of the culture gap. There was precious little time for them to talk at leisure during the week and even had such talk been attempted, Tien found that there was such a gap “in age and in knowledge there” that she did not wish to confuse them or trouble them. As a result of this disconnect, Tien appreciated the opportunity her AVID classmates and teacher provided for the sharing the experience of completing high school and going on to college. I took away the sense that for Tien, being the only one, the only Asian kid and the only one in her household familiar with and engaged in the college-going process, was difficult. All the same, she was able to find a way to bridge the gap in a sense. She found that what she learned in AVID “just solidified what my parents had taught me” and may have contributed to the way she formed her identity both as her parents’ daughter and as the striving learner AVID taught her to be.

While her time in AVID may have been brief, only a school year and her senior year at that, by the second semester, she had come to view her teacher as a counselor, advisor, and mentor. She mentions that she helped more than one student through trying circumstances in and out of school. She learned from her teacher how to “adjust mentally with the stress I have to take throughout the years, because of, you figure out a way, what you can do for your own way too.” An emphasis during the experience was on doing things “effectively.” Be it reading, taking notes or remembering things, it had to be done effectively. Through being required to immerse herself fully in her work, she came to discover what worked for her as a learner and as a thinker. AVID “helped me through to adjust – to develop more skills and you know, use what you have... and find what you don’t.”

While in college, she has taken a job as an AVID tutor at the other high school in her adopted hometown. Any AVID tutor is required to be a recent high school graduate who is

majoring in a topic sought by the AVID teacher such as math or science generally but often calculus, trigonometry, biology or physics specifically. Each week, Tuesdays and Thursdays in Tien's class, tutors were present in class. Each student was expected to bring a completed Tutoring Request Form (TRF) to specify the trouble she was having with a course or an assignment. During the tutoring session, three to six students would work with the tutor to resolve their issues but the tutor's role was primarily as a facilitator rather than an instructor. Students who had taken or were taking the same class or were otherwise knowledgeable collaborated to help resolve the issue. Tutors offered technical expertise but the onus of problem solving was on the students themselves. Finding herself the adult and the expert in this role gave Tien some insight into the role her own teachers and tutors had played in her developing identity and the way she approaches her developing students. She said "I kind of lived the experience but in middle school, through my students."

She contrasted the school she attended, which, although a strong majority of students were middle class and white, had a definite immigrant and low-income presence as compared with its crosstown rival which largely lacked an immigrant and low-income population. She noted that the middle income and affluent students she worked with as a tutor lacked the urgency of those not similarly situated. Unlike the students she took AVID with, many of those she tutored felt that they had multiple options for a successful life. Her classmates had been taught from an early age that the only acceptable path to a successful life led through college and that the end goal was to "get out of this scene." One of Tien's middle school students, whose father was incarcerated and whose mother was ill, had approached her and told her about her situation asking "Is it ever going to get better?" Tien replied that while there were aspects of the child's situation that she could not relate to, she felt that if the student participated fully in the AVID

program, not only doing the assignments but using the skills it taught, life would indeed get better.

In terms of the process of forming identity in relation to power, this strikes me as evidence of a student not only internalizing the skills and ethos of the AVID program but synthesizing from them a way forward that she not only believes in herself but considers useful advice to someone in a more precarious situation than she herself had occupied at a younger age. This internalization and reflection in turn suggests an archaeological and diachronic look at what is taking place within Tien's production of identity both for herself and for her student (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 2010). In unpacking what is contained in this interaction, I am guided by chapter four of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 2010). Entitled "The Comparative Facts," it is Foucault's attempt to replace hermeneutics with his practice of archaeology.

Throughout her interview, Tien made reference to external influences. Her parents expected her to achieve on a high level by earning good grades in her classes and finding out the way to attend college but had little knowledge of what to do to help her. As a result, she became motivated to appreciate her AVID teacher's perspective on what would best help her achieve the twin goals of high grades and college attendance. That motivation and those perspectives evolved over the course of her high school and college years through the process of being a student in secondary school, being an undergraduate and being a mentor to the students she taught, her younger sister, and even to her parents. This evolution from a young teenager who came to the United States from Vietnam speaking only limited English and having little understanding of the American system of education and indeed of American culture as a whole to a young adult whose understanding contained gaps but had nevertheless developed sufficiently

to allow her not only to work productively toward her own goals but also to help her develop the skills and thinking that would enable others to do the same.

### **Isabel**

Isabel is a woman in her early twenties who was an AVID student over the course of four years from middle school through her senior year in high school. She graduated from a large suburban high school on the perimeter of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Upon graduation, she enrolled in a large public university situated in central Texas. She was among the members of the founding class when AVID was implemented in her school district and was able to observe the program's growth over the course of her secondary school career. When we spoke, she was on the cusp of graduating and seeking certification as an English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) teacher. She has since graduated and been certified as a teacher and is considering returning to school for her Master's degree.

Isabel's parents came to the United States from Mexico and she was born here. Her AVID class was composed largely of fellow Latinx students with a small number of white and African-American students included. The North Texas town she grew up in has a smaller proportion of racial/ethnic minorities than the wider region and Hispanic people, specifically those from Mexico, are the most numerous minority with African-Americans trailing significantly. This reflects the overall trends observed in AVID enrollment (AVID, 2013h). Even in white-majority schools, the students in AVID tend not to be white. Isabel and her fellow participants, while they noticed this phenomenon and remarked on it to varying extents, did not mention that they found it offensive or troubling. Indeed, they mentioned initially having to counter the notion that it was some sort of remedial class for students who struggled

academically and eventually coming to take pride in the fact that they had been selected by their teachers to participate on the basis of their performance and their potential.

Isabel describes taking away from her AVID experience a seemingly paradoxical independent/collaborative approach to her college studies. She also values organization highly. These traits she credits, to a greater or lesser extent, to her time in AVID. The expected autonomy of the college experience is known to be daunting to many but for Isabel, it was an exercise in using what she had learned. AVID makes much of organizational tools such as Cornell notes and binders as well as formative activities such as tutoring sessions and Socratic seminars, wherein students use text marking and citation as a way of supporting their theses. All of these activities found fertile ground in Isabel's approach to college. She related that, for example, while she may not have been as diligent as her AVID teacher might have liked in keeping her binder, she continues to maintain binders in her apartment that help organize multiple aspects of her life. As in her AVID class, she is quick to strike up collaborative relationships with colleagues in class in order to resolve issues with understanding concepts and complete assignments. She has also developed her own version of Cornell notes in keeping with her overall theme of modifying the practices of AVID for her own use.

Isabel spoke of her introduction to AVID in the sixth grade. She describes her experience in elementary school of having an awareness of college but little idea of what she needed to do to prepare for it. Her parents had little idea of university study and her teachers were not forthcoming with the information she sought. She recalls being in a meeting with another student and a counselor where she was informed that a new program aimed at helping students complete their high school program and enter a four-year college. She was told that she and the

other student had been selected based on their potential and she was eager to participate. She credits that meeting as the genesis of her current academic trajectory.

In Isabel's recollection, there was another aspect to her experience in AVID that helped her understand herself as a college-going person. Guest speakers are a common feature in AVID classrooms and her class was no exception. Speakers from a variety of highly-skilled professions were brought in to detail for students the process by which they came to be in those professions and the skills necessary to enter them. She credits them with easing her entry into the broader, more diverse world of her university and building her confidence in her ability to adapt and progress through her courses and her life as a member of the university community. Once in college, she was able to join and take a leadership role in a multicultural sorority which further broadened her horizons and enabled her to lead with steadfast confidence. Indeed, throughout my interactions with Isabel, I observed an ease with the process of the interview and participant conversation and a willingness to take initiative around introducing other evidence of her development as a high school and college student and as a leader in her sorority and in her professional life.

As with other participants, one aspect of the AVID experience was the sense of close-knit community in the AVID class that for some bordered on being like a family. Even post-high school, Isabel remains in contact with friends from home who were in AVID with her and is able to bond with new people she has met in college on the basis of their mutual experience in AVID. While it may be beyond the scope of the present research to look into the types of relationships people form in their AVID classes, I am nevertheless of the view that the young people who take part in it play no small part in forming one another's identities as college-going individuals who are part of a larger college-going society.

Multiple participants reported difficulty conveying the meaning of participation in an AVID class and their academic needs to others in their lives. In Isabel's case, the time constraints were a source of friction. When enrolled in two to three advanced placement courses, she found the bulk of her free time taken up with homework, leaving what her parents considered an insufficient amount of time for family commitments. This persisted, Isabel reports, until her parents attended her high school awards ceremony and her parents became aware of the amount she had garnered in scholarships. She stated:

I think by the time I – they had dropped me off at the dorm, I know my mom ... basically thanked the Lord for the organizations that were kind enough to raise money for students like myself that were first generation that wanted to receive a college education. So I feel like once... the day came that I was a freshman in the dorm, that's when she realized that there was a purpose behind everything.

In addition to influencing Isabel's course selections, AVID impressed upon her the need to build a strong résumé of work and volunteering skills. While this too impinged upon her time with her family, she considered it important. Initially, this was because her AVID teacher, whom she admired greatly, was pushing her to do it. As she became engaged in her volunteer work, however, she came to appreciate the need for it in her community and began to pursue it for its own sake. What began as a way to build a résumé became something she felt strongly about. That sense of purpose in volunteer work led her, over the course of three major changes and two universities, to decide to become an ESOL/Bilingual Education teacher. Her experience as an AVID tutor was one of the things she credited with her decision. She found the challenge of engaging students and developing their interest and acumen in academic work fulfilling, which she felt stimulated a somewhat latent desire to be a teacher.

Perhaps unwittingly seeing herself as a subject influenced by norms even prior to her awareness of them, she relates that when she was in elementary school, one of her teachers who would eventually become her AVID teacher saw her potential and recommended her for the program. As a result of that belief in the possibility that she might go on to complete college given appropriate support, Isabel has discovered in herself not only the potential to be a college graduate in a way that is affordable and manageable for her but also someone who finds pleasure in helping others, both similarly situated to herself and not. Where she had been concerned about whether she would be able to leave her parents' home independently and go on to higher educational attainment, she now has a desire to assist others in their attainment as well.

This achievement did not occur entirely outside the presence of detractors and distractions. Isabel relates that her parents came to value her academic work more highly as a university student because she was working for her classes and for money to pay the portion of her tuition and fees not covered by scholarships, grants or waivers. They respected what she referred to as "hustle." In high school, some teachers doubted that a student such as her could be successful in their demanding advanced placement courses but her AVID teacher helped serve her students as an advocate and had gained them a reputation as capable young people with a support network behind them. In higher education, however, those supports were not present and at times, her professors would advise her to drop the course or change her major on the basis of one assignment. What helped her persevere was, to her, the same thing that had kept some of her AVID classmates from transferring to a four-year university: confidence. She had come to conceive of herself as someone who was perfectly capable, despite being a first-generation college student, of achieving what she had set out to achieve and that conception powered her through the difficult encounters in her undergraduate study.

## **Andrew**

Andrew attended a comprehensive high school in a large urban district in Texas and was a business major at the same university Isabel attends. When we spoke, he had plans to graduate the following August. A mentoring program his AVID teacher had organized along with Rotary International had put him in touch with an executive who was a member of the Highland Park, Texas chapter of the organization and who was helping him distribute his résumé. Highland Park being one of the most affluent zip codes in Texas, he felt that this association was promising. He was raised by his mother, a housekeeper, in a high-poverty area of North Texas. He mentioned having a stepfather for a time but did not mention any lasting male influence in his younger life. Andrew had a rather broad experience of AVID teachers. He had one in middle school, two in high school, and during the course of his college career had worked for three more as a tutor in the town where he went to school. In his AVID class, he recalls, most of the students were from families of lower socioeconomic status, and whose parents either had not attended or had not completed college. Many of his classmates were the first generation to be born in the United States as well as being the first generation to attend a university.

Regarding the composition of his classes, Andrew noted that in addition to those he was enrolled in during high school, he was familiar with those in which he had tutored. Across all classes, he noted a disproportionate number of black and Latinx students, typically of what he considered lower middle class. Many of the students were bilingual and bicultural. Those who had fathers as part of their nuclear families often found them working in the fields of construction or landscaping, as is often true of Latinx immigrants in Texas.

Andrew describes experiencing a “turning point” during middle school in which his AVID teacher asked the class to describe the things they sought in life and to research what

would be required to attain or achieve them. For Andrew, it was something of an eye-opening experience to realize not only how much effort would be involved in attaining or achieving those goals but also some of the things he had lacked growing up in a single-income working class home. This realization, along with the guidance of his teacher in researching the typical salaries for various professions and lines of work helped him realize that, like Tien, his path to his goals ran through a university campus. When he began to work and pay some of his own bills at the age of sixteen, the effort and the stress along with his own maturation caused his appreciation for what his mother and his teachers had done for him to evolve and increase. Despite these insights, his home life was plagued with domestic troubles and even as a seventeen-year-old, he was unable to conceive of college as something that would actually work out for him. He found it difficult to focus on the college-going process due to family and financial disruptions but when he arrived at his university, the broader view of the world beyond his upbringing and the new people and perspectives he was exposed to felt like a significant adjustment to him. He was proud of the courage he had demonstrated to become the first in his family to graduate from college and likens the feeling of confidence that he has to the feeling he experienced in his AVID class. Speaking about the kinds of activities he had done there, the Cornell notes, binder checks and tutorials, he said “This is kind of working your mentality”.

The AVID program at Andrew’s middle school appears to have been in its fledgling state when he joined it in seventh grade. There was no formal interview process, only a recommendation from a teacher and a willingness on the part of the student to do what the program requires. Among the challenges he mentions are Cornell notes, which he abandoned as a sophomore in college. However, it seems noteworthy that while many might consider it remarkable that the habit survived high school at all, Andrew felt guilty to have stopped using

them. A relatively common thread across participants was a distinct deference to the AVID model of academic success. He seemed almost relieved to change the subject and discuss the devoted use of a planner, which is another AVID tenet.

Tutorials were another meaningful aspect of the AVID program for Andrew. In the AVID view, it is important for students to develop the ability to collaborate, find solutions and advocate for themselves. According to one AVID teacher I spoke with (A. Campbell, personal communication, June 7, 2017), strategies like tutorials, in which approximately six students typically work with an undergraduate majoring in a field related to a class at the secondary school, create a situation in which students have access to a subject matter expert but that expert is trained not to provide answers unless they are necessary for student progress. They require completion of a tutorial request form which is, in actuality, an opportunity for students to reflect on their academic dilemma and frame it as solvable problem. They are also designed to put students in a situation where their learning is dependent on their ability to get past whatever stumbling blocks may impede their progress in the subject matter. For instance, Andrew cites a lack of self-confidence and organization as two things that tutorials helped him overcome. He also believes he benefitted from exposure to diverse ideas, points of view and approaches to problem solving in the tutorial groups.

Taken in the larger sense, Andrew viewed his strengths and weaknesses as combined. On the one hand, if he failed to put sufficient effort in to a test or an assignment, he would receive a grade that did not meet his standard of performance. He attributes the ability to look critically at the steps that led to his disappointing performance and to make adjustments and corrections to the attitude that he learned through his engagement in AVID activities and processes. For him, the question of attaining an outcome he considers acceptable, even laudable, comes down to his

confidence in his ability to pursue it and his self-discipline during the task itself. This may all seem fairly obvious to those of us in the education and academic fields but the extent to which Andrew believed and practiced it is, anecdotally speaking, uncommon among his peers.

The familial atmosphere described by Tien, Michael and Isabel was less prominent in Andrew's AVID class in his estimation. This may have been a component of his guilt over setting aside AVID practices such as Cornell notes upon entering college. Andrew was friends with Isabel and Dahlia in college and was aware of their feelings about their classmates as well as their continued, albeit modified, use of Cornell notes. He may have been making a comparison (perhaps unwittingly) to their classes and AVID practices. Still, he commented on the greater sense of positivity in his AVID class as compared to other groups he associated with in high school. He reports having looked forward to his AVID class meeting more often than not and attributes a good portion of that to his teacher. Her positive attitude combined with the mix of students she chose to be in the class contributed to a group where Andrew could be "genuine and vulnerable". As he has experienced other AVID classes through his work as a tutor, he has noticed that such classes tend to be very open, trusting and non-judgmental spaces. As he recalled his experience, he grew animated at the realization that much of the judgment that normally occurs in a high school population was missing from the AVID group. He also recalled a sense of friendly competition among his classmates. They pushed one another to overcome challenges while also keeping one another accountable if not by direct intervention then by setting an example. The competitive spirit became involved when one student's grades or achievements began to outstrip Andrew's. For all the competition and accountability, though, the sense of community was the main takeaway. While Andrew and his classmates generally

went their separate ways after high school, those with whom he has stayed in contact have all been people he met in AVID.

Persistence and courage are perhaps underappreciated virtues by those for whom college seems a given. This was certainly true in my case as an undergraduate. For students whose backgrounds do not point definitively to college completion, however, developing the courage to exist in and comport with such an extraordinary community as the university is a definite factor among first generation college students. Andrew relates the story of one of his AVID classmates who was attending another university in Texas. He said she was behind in her studies not because she had “slacked or anything” but because she had taken some time off to travel the world and involve herself in projects such as building schools in Nicaragua and Peru and helping with elephant rescue in Thailand. He credits AVID’s requirement that one take risks and that students put themselves “in uncomfortable situations when we needed to so that we could be ultimately more successful in life”.

Asked for an example in his own life, he related that during the summer after his junior year, the large urban district where he attended high school had partnered with the mayor’s office to provide internships to students that would allow them to become acclimated to the “professional environment so they can see what the professional world looks like”. He experienced significant trepidation around the experience, however. Weeks after finding out about the program, he had still not applied because he did not feel he would be accepted and even had he been, he would not have been able to keep up. His AVID teacher, however, applied pressure to go ahead and apply, which he did. The experience connected him to a number of professionals in different fields and honed his communication skills. Though he feared he would not be able to accomplish his job during the internship even if he were to get it, he was invited to

return the summer after his senior year and he has returned intermittently since then to work and continue building his network of contacts.

Perhaps the zenith of Andrew's confidence building was when his AVID teacher encouraged him to apply to speak at an AVID summer conference before an audience of 4000 people. Following that, the school district where he went to high school obtained video footage of his speech and, having seen it, invited him to speak at a district-wide event the following year. He said "I don't think I would have had the courage at that age to do something that big if it wasn't for AVID and for my AVID instructor and for the people that were...mentors". On the subject of mentors, Andrew noted his participation in other programs outside of AVID but not independent from it. He and his classmates were encouraged by their AVID teacher, who also facilitated their participation, to take part in Interact Club, a youth offshoot of Rotary International, and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Both associations resulted in contact and relationships with highly educated professionals working in fields of interest.

Andrew and I spoke about the perceptions others in his life had regarding his participation in AVID and his eventual college career. Most of his friends in high school were also his AVID classmates and if not, were classmates in the AP classes he took. They shared, then, something of a common interest and so the notion of attaining high grades and preparing for college was something of a given. Andrew's home life was different in that his mother, not being from the United States, had little concept of its education system or the role that college could play in a young person's life. While she did not begrudge his time spent on studies, she did not encourage it either. According to Andrew, she stopped checking his report card at some point in middle school so accountability for him lay elsewhere. While his mother was happy for his success and proud of him for being in college, she was hesitant to see her son leave home and

live apart from her. Andrew relates that this is common among Hispanic families and anecdotal evidence would tend to support that assertion. One of Andrew's priorities is to introduce financial stability in his family's life. His mother has been willing to accept that this goal may be deferred for a time even as she has watched her friends' children leave high school and go directly into the labor force or into community college close to home.

As for the influence Andrew perceives AVID to have had on his academic trajectory, he considers it to have been significant. He based his high school course selections on his AVID teacher's advice and found himself pursuing far more rigorous coursework than he would have pursued on his own. He also credited his AVID experience with helping him to navigate the nuts and bolts practical aspects of college study. As is typical of AVID classes, the college and financial aid application process begins during junior year and carries on right up to acceptance and graduation in the spring of students' senior year. His teacher showed him the process and coached his approach to it and then dedicated her evenings and weekends during the time immediately prior to Thanksgiving to working with students to ensure that they had all their materials ready to submit. He describes how students had stacks of folders to send to schools and the organization and expertise his instructor brought to the process.

When asked about the carry-over of lessons learned in AVID to his life as an undergraduate, he drew something of a distinction between the first two and a half years of AVID in high school and the last year and a half. The final part was dedicated to getting into college and finding a way to pay for it but the first part, dedicated to becoming an academically capable person, was what stuck with him. Development of skills like time management, planning, note-taking and syllabus use stood him in good stead throughout his bachelor's coursework. Being able to work collaboratively yet independently was another thing Andrew

found important. He notes that as a university student, it is unwise to expect professors to provide reminders of work due or tests coming up and attributes the 4.0 GPA he earned during his first semester as a freshman to the skills and expectations of himself that he learned in AVID. Among those expectations was the idea that it is wise and productive to make oneself a part of an academic community by meeting with and emailing professors and forming collaborative study groups with colleagues. While he acknowledges room for growth in the area of collaborative interaction, he credits AVID for the steps that he did take.

Indeed, asked to sum up his overall impression of his experience in AVID, Andrew undertook to explain to me what having a constant in his high school life that provided him with knowledge, insight, and a guiding hand that was familiar with the college process meant to him. AVID was the only class he took for all four years of his high school career and it was the one which became something of a touchstone for him. Growing up in a home and a community where understanding of education is hard to come by, he felt that the mentoring role played by his AVID teacher was essential to his success later in life. Regarding his AVID teachers, he said “AVID teachers are also there. They’re teachers but they’re there also to kind of be your counselor, your advisor. Like I say, many of our parents...just don’t understand the importance of education. They’re not really involved in our education”. His view was that because his AVID teachers got to know him on a more profound level than his other teachers and provided him and his classmates with a space for vulnerability and challenge and growth, he was able to tap into resources that may have eluded him had she not. This effect may not, however, be primarily due to the nature of AVID.

## **Dahlia**

Dahlia was a classmate of Isabel's who graduated the same year and went on to the same university as Isabel. She recalls being recruited for the AVID program in junior high at its inception in her high school vertical and that many of the same students began the program and stayed with it throughout their high school years. She observed that because the students in her class spent so much time together, they became very close. Dahlia is the only participant to remark on students' spending significant time together on a routine basis and marks that as the factor that drove the sense of community in her group, with whom she continues to maintain close contact. Asked to describe characteristics that her classmates had, she mentions that, like her, many were of Mexican descent although other countries and ethnicities were also present. Based on what participants have said, the fact that they were all of Latin American or Southeast Asian descent, and my own observations during a visit to one of their former teachers' classroom, it does seem to be the case, at least for this small group of participants, that considerably more non-white students are enrolled in AVID classes than white students.

Dahlia's was another voice supporting the significance of AVID teacher involvement. Her teacher in middle school, one of those who helped found the AVID program in her district, was very enthusiastic about making it work and demonstrated his enthusiasm for it through interest in and concern for his students' well-being. Upon entering high school, Dahlia found that her new teacher emphasized the AVID tenet of rigor with support (AVID, 2013g). She pressed students to enroll in pre-advanced placement and advanced placement courses but also sought to ensure that they had the support they needed. That support came, in part, in the form of tutors. Dahlia particularly appreciated her teacher's astute selection of tutors. Those tutors were college students who had been through many of the things the then-current group of high

school students was experiencing and who had insight into those challenges as well as the challenges that lay ahead of them as they approached matriculation into university study.

Dahlia brought up another topic that begins to explain why AVID Center is as particular as it is about the circumstances under which its program is implemented in high school. As it transpired, I was able to get both sides of the situation during my time with Dahlia's AVID teacher. During her senior year, the administration at Dahlia's high school needed an ESOL teacher and the AVID teacher happened to have taught ESOL at the elementary level previously and was therefore certified to teach it at the secondary level. On the school's master schedule, the AVID class was combined with an ESOL class with the same teacher. As a result, the teacher's time was divided between the two groups with results that satisfied no one in the classroom, according to both Dahlia and the teacher. The AVID students eventually felt they were falling behind on their college applications and initiated a work stoppage, declining to participate in tutorials until their applications had been completed. This brought about a meeting between the students and their teacher and an agreement that the class would shift focus at least until after application season in November. The teacher recalled the incident similarly, saying that the administration had been trying to combine classes for some time and although she had successfully resisted it in the past, she simply had not had the enrollment numbers necessary to make her case that year.

As did other participants, Dahlia felt that one of the durable influences of her time in AVID was reflected in her approach to organization of time and obligations. She credits AVID with teaching her to use a planner, take notes, and keep things together through the use of binders. While she has adapted her note-taking strategy to take in the needs of her college coursework, she reports that her notes still bear considerable resemblance to the Cornell notes

she took in high school. She also pointed out that AVID taught her the importance of building relationships with professors and her colleagues but acknowledged that given her work schedule and other commitments conflicting with those of other students and professors, she sometimes struggled to put that knowledge into practice. She did, however, manage to take advantage of the supplemental tutoring her university offered. As she describes it, it is a practice at her university to survey students regarding their availability and to provide a student who has already taken the course and made an A to facilitate the study groups. Indeed, when asked, she noticed that the tutorial sessions in her college classes bore a strong resemblance to those in her high school AVID classes.

Asked about her college aspirations, Dahlia let me know that her family had come to the United States when she was younger and it had been impressed on her and her siblings that “the main reason you are here is because we want you to be better than we are. We want you to go to college...”. She had, therefore, always held university study as a goal and when, in seventh grade, she was offered the opportunity to participate in AVID, she viewed it as a significant step toward achieving that goal, particularly inasmuch as neither of her parents had the ability to help her prepare for college. “They didn’t have that idea to prepare me mentally” she said. As others have mentioned, the teacher was a key factor in bringing her to a mental state that has been beneficial to her as a student in higher education. With regard to her entry into the AVID program, she recalls a teacher who had seen her work and discussed her goals with her. On one occasion, he seems to have conducted something of an interview with her as she received a letter informing her of her admission not long after a conversation she considered peculiar. She relates that her father struggled to understand that importance of the class but that he had faith in her belief that it would be beneficial, which she now feels was justified.

During her high school AVID courses, Dahlia found inspiration in some of the activities. She enjoyed the opportunity for college visits. Touring the campuses gave her a sense of the size of a university community and an impression of the type of community she hoped to enter. Among the things she felt AVID had prepared her well for in college was the notion that students are entirely responsible for submitting work by the deadline and that there would be no one “who’s holding your hand along the way... to make sure that you turn in all your work.” She expressed disappointment that the opportunity never arose for AVID students to spend extended time on a college campus than a day-long visit, however. A trip to do so had been attempted but was never carried out, possibly for budgetary reasons. She believed that more could have been done to prepare students for the day-to-day life of a college student, residential life in particular. She also appreciated the format of the tutorials. As a student in advanced placement math courses in high school, she made use of them to for her assignments but also enjoyed “challenge problems” for each chapter in her textbook. According to her, these challenge problems were even a challenge for the tutors, which fostered a spirit of collaborative learning among her classmates and developed her ability to be comfortable with admitting when she did not know how to solve a problem and be open to new ways of approaching the problem that eventually yielded success. This tutorial experience proved particularly beneficial during a chemistry course in which Dahlia reports having had considerable difficulty. Because of the relationship she had with her tutor and the extra time the tutor was willing to spend with her, Dahlia was able to pass the course and receive credit for it while at the same time learning to grasp that there was a process underway on the teacher’s side of the class and how understanding it might allow one to access the content in a more rewarding way.

When asked about the impressions among her friends and family of her time in AVID, she echoed other participants' sentiment that those not in AVID with her did not appreciate the purpose of all the time she spent at school or working on homework. While her father had taken her word that it would be worthwhile in the end, Dahlia became convinced of its value to the extent that she ensured she was able to take AVID all four years of high school by taking a summer school course before her junior year to free up a space in her schedule for it. She also enrolled in a dual credit course (a course offered at a local community college which is taught at a high school by a qualified instructor employed by the school district) rather than an advanced placement course for the same reason even though the advanced placement course would have been her preference due to its rigor. Asked about her views on placing her own children in an AVID class, she averred that she would definitely encourage them to go even though she felt she had taken away enough knowledge and skills from her own time there to be able to help prepare them herself to succeed in school. During her own high school career, she was the only one of her father's children living with him as her brother remained in Mexico. During her senior year, he came to the United States and saw firsthand the kind of work his sister was doing as he had been placed in the ESOL class that was collocated with her AVID class and which had been detracting from her teacher's time spent on college applications. He was curious about several of the techniques his sister employed to get through her classes and asked about her Cornell notes and her binder specifically. At times, their teacher would interrupt an ESOL lesson to make a point about something the AVID students were doing.

As a result of her time in AVID, Dahlia struggles to have patience with other undergraduates who do not take their studies as seriously as she believes they should nor does she hold most students' organizational abilities or note-taking in high regard. She has chosen to

double major in biology and psychology and so is further from graduation than some of her contemporaries but she says she is seriously considering a career in psychiatry. This would be no mean feat but she contends that her time in AVID gave her the skills and experience she feels she needs to be able to persevere through challenging coursework and the confidence to select such an undertaking in the first place. She became animated as we discussed the changes she had undergone through high school and entering college. She says:

I've never had a very high self-esteem when it came to school stuff. It was kind of like I would just go in and go out. Just do my work and then get whatever grade I got and I thought I deserved it but when I got to AVID the tutors and the teachers and even the other students they would always let me know how smart they thought I was. How much potential I had.

She goes on to describe her early days at the university as a time when she was noticeably more adept at academic processes like forming and leading study groups than her peers and not hesitating to step forward and take on leadership roles in such situations. She believes that her time in AVID helped her become more collaborative and outspoken and that those traits enable her not only to pursue her own learning but to be of help to others as well.

One of Dahlia's final thoughts was one of the most striking for me. She related that one of her most memorable moments from the beginning of freshman year came during orientation. After a morning of icebreaker activities and a communal lunch, the university escorted the participants into a lecture hall for a mock lecture. Before the faculty member presenting the lecture began, the facilitators began passing out a handout. It turned out to be a page of Cornell notes and Dahlia thought to herself "I've got this. I know what this is for. I've been a pro at this for five years. I know how to do this." For all the trepidation she had experienced during the

process of moving into her dorm and meeting new people and all the myriad stressors that accompany the beginning of a new college career, this one moment gave her the sense that she had been right all along and that AVID did indeed prepare her for college.

### **Isabel and Andrew: Participant conversation**

Isabel and Andrew were able to meet on the campus of their university for a participant conversation. Both were enrolled in the July block of summer school and had only their current courses to complete before graduation. When we met, they were eagerly anticipating finishing their degrees and entering the workforce, she in education and he in business. As they reflected on the journey that had led them there, they remained convinced that AVID had played no small part in the way things had gone during their time as undergraduates. They had attended different high schools but had come to know one another as AVID tutors in the college town's school district. They both described very different high schools but notably similar AVID classes. This is not completely unexpected as my research for the first two chapters of the current work revealed that AVID Center puts a great deal of thought into ensuring that high schools enact the AVID curriculum with considerable fidelity, as described by McLaughlin (1976). That being said, some differences are inevitable and were apparent at points in our conversation. For example, Isabel described her class as being highly collaborative yet demanding while Andrew saw his as having more good-natured competition. Where their experiences converged was in the agreement that something exceptional existed in their AVID classes. Andrew offered that his class was "kind of like a branch that was an external branch that's not included in the stereotypical high school.," to which Isabel added "That was true because in most classes there's [*sic*] people that wouldn't get along and in here... there was a sense of respect."

Of this “sense of respect,” both viewed the teacher as an important driver in terms of the way she treated students. By setting an example of a respectful relationship, both of them said their teachers encouraged students to be open to questioning some of their assumptions about themselves and their backgrounds they had brought into the classroom. While Andrew, who is Hispanic, was in the majority in his high school and Isabel, also Hispanic, was in the minority in hers, both reported a racially/ethnically diverse group of students in their AVID classes that was nevertheless more homogeneous with regard to ambition, aspiration and expectation for themselves in terms of academic progress. Although Andrew attended a relatively poorly funded urban school and Isabel attended a better-funded suburban school, the parallels between their AVID classes were notable. Interestingly, Isabel reports that during her time in the program, more and more white students began to participate in AVID. Though her high school and the community it serves are overwhelmingly white and conservative, it would seem that some openness to exploring potentially effective academic interventions exists and may be a fruitful course of inquiry to pursue, particularly given the current divide in American society along conservative/progressive lines. It was noteworthy to me that Isabel mentioned these newcomers to her AVID class and elaborated that the atmosphere of collegiality that existed in the classroom extended to them as well. While not as close to the new students as she was to those with whom she had longer-standing relationships, she nevertheless had a solid working relationship with them.

On the topic of their transition from high school to college and how their experience in AVID may have influenced the way they constructed their college-going academic identities, they both saw themselves as empowered by the experience in ways that would have been difficult for them to conceive of prior to it. Isabel began her undergraduate career at a public

university in downtown Dallas known for its nursing program. She described herself in the beginning as “naïve.” immersing herself in the culture of college students away from the constraints of home for the first time. After one year at this university, she chose to transfer as her interests in terms of a major had changed. It was at this point that she believes her AVID training was particularly valuable. “I felt like if I didn’t have AVID I probably would not know how to apply to schools much less how to transfer.” She also credits her time in AVID with giving her the framework she needed to formulate her expectations for herself as a woman in college and to help her find similarly minded people, to a lesser extent in her general education classes and to a greater extent in her major courses.

Andrew reflected that for him, his transition to higher education was characterized by feelings of uncertainty. When he began college, and at times throughout, money was a source of stress as was encountering the diversity engendered by a collegiate community in terms of race/ethnicity, background, and belief system. He considers himself lucky to have met a friend early on who was able to serve not only as an entrée into rural modes of thinking but also as a roommate, presumably easing some of the financial strain. Andrew felt that he was constructing a new identity for himself because his childhood and adolescent identities had gone as far as they could go and the need was present for a new self which would be suited to encountering and acting within the norms and schema of his new life.

To encapsulate the overall sense of Isabel and Andrew’s conversation related to their identity production, it would be fair to say that they came into AVID with hopes that may have been higher than some similarly situated people may have had but with little real idea of how to realize those aspirations. Isabel said “I just didn’t know a lot about a lot of things so I felt like the class [AVID], if I didn’t take it, I wouldn’t even be [at] a four-year university.” In addition to

giving specific guidance toward finding, applying to and attending college, both Andrew and Isabel believed that the experiences they had during AVID built their sense of themselves as confident, capable people. Andrew's experience addressing crowds of thousands and Isabel's experience shifting herself from one university to another were examples of this confidence in action. After Isabel discussed her lack of confidence in applying for scholarships and her AVID teacher's support and encouragement, Andrew commented:

I think that's the key right there. The thing that AVID does is unleash that potential.

Like you find that potential as an individual and at that age I think you have so much of it so it just helps unleash that potential for good in people.

Asked to respond to the notion that their AVID experiences had caused them to begin to ask themselves "Well why can't I?", both Andrew and Isabel felt strongly that the combination of their teachers' support of their educational efforts and the prodding they experienced from classmates, both explicit in the competition for grades and awards and implicit in the things they saw their classmates doing, were a factor in the way they saw themselves as beings in their worlds. Andrew again:

Absolutely. I think I have to "ask myself why can't I" in everything I do. I feel like I just set very high expectations. It's because it's a competitive world out here and you always want to be above the standard and I think that's something that AVID instilled in me.

Despite the confidence they seem to have taken away from AVID, both Andrew and Isabel continue to experience self-doubt. When asked what feedback they would have for their younger selves, their minds went immediately to critique. When asked specifically what they would have congratulated themselves on as high school juniors, they maintained their critique

but eventually allowed that one thing they admired about themselves as high school juniors was the courage they had demonstrated to engage in the process at all inasmuch as it was something alien to their loved ones and well outside the realm of anything they had experienced previously. They saw their junior year as something of a pivot from the superficial, less-engaged identity of their freshman and sophomore years in high school. Isabel recalled junior year as the first time she attempted three advanced placement courses at once. It was a very stressful experience for her and difficulties with a teacher made it worse but she believes that she relied on the identity she had developed in AVID and the support of other, more sympathetic teachers to get her through it. It would appear that despite vicissitudes in school and home life, both Isabel and Andrew came to see themselves for the most part as confident, competent people who had access to the knowledge and support they used to position themselves where they were when we spoke: on the cusp of college graduation and entry into the workforce or further education.

### **Emergent Themes**

#### **The Evolving Self**

“I feel like AVID really taught me to be more driven, care about school work, not be afraid to ask questions..., learn to interact with people and help others.”

-Isabel

“I had to be taught to be aggressive.”

-Michael

In her book *Senses of the Subject*, Judith Butler (2015b) presents a series of essays in which she considers the ideas of other thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Malebranche, Spinoza, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Irigaray, and Sartre through the lens of her own ideas on the performative nature of identity. She sees it as a series of acts, conscious and unconscious, that are reiterated,

reproduced and changed by a partially autonomous subject in reaction to and in conjunction with social norms that vary on a contextual basis. Taking this as a point of departure, I sought to apply this idea to the experience of my participants. This line of thought is particularly appealing to me in that it takes in to account the variance between the multiple identities my participants found themselves assuming. The work of Michel Foucault has been a significant influence of Butler's thinking. From a Foucauldian perspective, this brings to mind the practice of *archaeology* (Foucault, 2010), which, through epistemes and discursive formations reduces the value of previous iterations of the self and allows them to be replaced by a hybrid model of behavior influenced by both the external power structure and the internal agent.

Keeping in mind Foucault's evolving position on both his archaeology and hermeneutics, I will side-step the argument over which is the more revelatory method of analysis and will instead adopt a diachronic approach to examine how, for example, Tien's views on how the things we do influence the way our lives turn out may have evolved.

Butler (2015b) holds that:

When we speak about subject formation, we invariably presume a threshold of susceptibility or impressionability that may be said to precede the formation of a conscious and deliberate "I". That means only that this creature that I am is affected by something outside of itself, understood as prior, that activates and informs the subject that I am. (p. 1)

Butler continues:

We tend to make a mistake when, in trying to explain subject formation, we imagine only a single norm acting as a kind of "cause" and then imagine the "subject" as something formed in the wake of its own action (p. 5)

She goes on to stipulate that when she uses the first person subject pronoun, she intends for the reader to understand that she means not only herself, but us as well. “All those who come to use the pronoun” (p. 1), in fact. Her larger point is that none of us arrives at an experience as an entity completely unaffected either by our previous experience or by what has affected the nature of the experience we perceive. She pursues the conscious/unconscious nature of experience and relates it to the beginning of the novel *David Copperfield*, in which the subject describes his own birth. This description seems to be a challenge to the reader to decide whether the author is speaking for himself or if he is willing to be spoken about. When thinking about this process of “subject formation” (p. 2), it is perhaps also beneficial to consider Isabel as a subject-in-formation from her time in middle school to the time she and I spoke.

In identifying data points and synthesizing a finding, I would point to the home self, the high school self in AVID and the collegiate self. Each self can be seen as evolving and as having an influence on the other selves. For instance, as Dahlia, Isabel and Andrew noted, their home selves came from backgrounds where Spanish was the dominant language and where parents felt that college was a good thing in the abstract but had very little understanding of it as it exists in the world. Tien and Michael had home selves who knew that college was the expectation, even if family circumstances and occupational preferences meant that finding ways to make it a reality were going to be a challenge.

### **The Home Self**

“Many of our parents just don’t understand the importance of education. They’re not really involved in our education... and AVID teaches us to really get them involved... to get a better understanding of what you’re going through and how they can ultimately help you through that situation.”

-Andrew

These home selves encountered AVID at some point along the path through K-12 education and, for reasons I believe may stem from a desire to answer questions about the way forward for them, opened themselves to the possibility of learning from the AVID paradigm. When they encountered AVID, they remember themselves as having been shy, lacking confidence and organization and generally being unaware of the shape of the larger world, despite their grasp of the fact of its existence. As they passed through time and interaction, they were explicitly taught (and sometimes rebelled against) techniques meant to develop their academic ability and along with it to enhance their sense of themselves as capable, knowledgeable students. Multiple participants remarked that they found themselves in competition with other students in college for grades, scholarships and leadership opportunities, something they could not have seen themselves doing prior to AVID. It is this growth from people who might have valued a college education in the abstract to people who knew how to obtain one absent the presence of factors often associated with college attendance, particularly the involvement of college-educated family members, that I find suggests strongly that these participants' time in AVID influenced the way they enact the performative aspects of their nature both consciously and unconsciously. While many paths to higher education exist, some are better trod than others. That these students were able to make the transition from wanting to go to college or feeling as if they should go to college to multiyear persistence therein is something they believed AVID played a distinct, albeit not definitive role.

## **The High School Self**

“We felt like a family in that class. I guess I grew into who I am.”

-Michael

In addition to influencing the choices and gestures participants made in high school, during matriculation and during university study, AVID influenced the way they constructed their high school selves. Given the commonality among my participants of this sense of the AVID class as a family unit, it seems reasonable to conclude that there was not only an intentional curriculum of collaboration but a seemingly inherent and grass roots curriculum of togetherness and mutual support. As I interpret these sentiments, the experience in AVID became so thoroughly ingrained in Michael’s view of herself and her ambition to graduate college that she scarcely considers any other path. This may be a combination of the outsider’s desire to best those at the center at their own game and the practical tenacity of one who is exceeding the expectations of some of those who hold a place of influence in her life. It may also have to do with the experiences, such as preparing for and taking part in tutorials, that forced her to bring her leadership attributes to the fore and that seem to have cemented them in her mode of functioning in a university setting that felt as though it had become second nature. Taken together, the perception of these participants was that they had undergone a transition in high school that they attribute to the culture and practices of their AVID classes. As ever, it is important to be aware of the normal process of growing up and making one’s way through adolescence. I believe nearly everyone could point to a process of growth over time but in the case of these participants, it had a distinctly AVID texture as evidenced by their unanimity on certain points, specifically the emphasis put on self-advocacy and the development (perhaps unintended) of a refined sense of self-critique. Indeed, when asked during the participant

conversation about things they would congratulate themselves on as high school juniors, Isabel and Andrew focused much more on critiques and had to be redirected to find an item of praise. When they eventually did acknowledge that they had done some things well, their focus was largely on simply having survived the experience. This is where I find their experience to diverge from what may have been expected of them had they not been in AVID. Having the priorities of a program they felt part of as if a family ingrained in their view of their identity, they chose courses of action that were cosseted both by their perception and that of their peers and AVID teachers of who they were as high school selves.

### **The College Self**

“They always told us it is not going to be the same thing as high school. There’s not going to be someone who’s holding your hand along the way... to make sure you turn in all your work.”

-Dahlia

A recurring notion in participants’ narratives of their high school selves was their perception of their AVID teacher. Each of them recalled instances in which the teacher (teachers, in Andrew’s case) acted as a mentor, an example, a goad, or a source of assistance, be it emotional or financial. Michael credits her AVID teacher with \$10,000 in scholarships procured. What comes through in the data is the importance of the AVID teacher in creating a high school self which can survive the end of high school and, through retention, rejection and adaptation, become a college self. One aspect of that seems to be the sense of urgency, as compared to the general student population in their high schools, about gaining admission to college and finding ways to pay for it. It seems, then, that in the process of enacting the AVID program, those involved, be they students, teachers, school districts or AVID Center itself, seem to have the task of developing a skilled, knowledgeable and resilient college self.

A notable element of Butler's idea of identity performance is the notion that our identity is made up not only of the conscious decisions we make but of the unconscious things we do as part of a reaction to external factors. We may have a perception of how others view us that causes us to modify our thinking or behavior in way we recognize and in ways we do not. I asked Michael what her thoughts were on the way AVID students were perceived by the larger student body and by their friends and family outside of AVID. By way of illustration, Michael noted that from the time they were first contacted by the AVID teacher and their counselor students were told that they had been selected for the class on the basis of their potential for college attendance. As such, the participants who spoke with me felt a certain pride at being a part of such a challenging experience as AVID and of the strides they hoped to make in their careers as a result of it. Their fellow students not involved in AVID often had the perception that it was more or less a study hall, a makeup period for students whose grades placed them in jeopardy of retention in grade or dropping out. The AVID students felt they knew better, that this was in fact a college preparatory program for which they had been selected on the basis of their likelihood to benefit from it. This sort of insider knowledge seems to have influenced the way they thought of themselves as being special and as having, despite some challenges, an opportunity to approach college armed with an understanding of the scholarly process their non-AVID colleagues may have lacked.

They internalized their experience to the extent that they hoped and endeavored, through their work as AVID tutors, to see it replicated. The task for a narrative inquiry analysis of this behavior from a poststructuralist theoretical framework based on the thinking of Judith Butler (which has itself evolved since its public debut in the mid-1980s) is to identify and explicate

instances in which we can see performativity at work and the identity in formation under the influence of the ideas Butler propounds.

### **Identity Formation via Performativity**

“The first semester (in college), I realized I don’t like people telling me what to do. So that’s why I chose math, ‘cause it gives you room to explain and to express yourself.”

-Tien

Each participant saw her or himself as very different from the young woman or man who entered AVID, the high school self and even the early college self. This was a perspective I had not anticipated, although perhaps I should have. Some people go through life with much the same views and priorities they began with. These individuals were notable in that they were dissatisfied with their parents’ lot in life and had a desire to make theirs different. That desire led them to instruction and interactions that caused them to raise their view of themselves (although they may dispute it) as capable doers of deeds. While one may argue in poststructural terms that there is no doer behind the deed (Butler, 1990), from a more prosaic point of view, these participants had a strong image of themselves as empowered agents acting in their best interest. To put the notion in an intelligible framework, these individuals took what they deemed best from the things they experienced and used it to turn themselves into people who were capable of the things they desired to do. As their expectations grew, so did their confidence. As their confidence grew, they adjusted their expectations. This became something of a feedback loop that has continued, albeit not necessarily in a straight line, to propel them forward in their lives and in their education. This relates to Butler’s (1990) concept of *reciprocity of influence*. According to this idea, she sees the self as partially pre-formed, based on a set of expectations on the part of society that existed before each of us was born and that shapes our growth within

society. We are not, however, powerless objects carried along on a current of other people's perceptions of how we should exist. Instead, we have the power as individuals to determine and process the influences that shape us and to endeavor to shape others. In this way, we can be seen to evolve as humans and as a society. Things that would have been unthinkable decades ago are now part of our reality, simply because enough people willed them to be.

### **Mutual Adaptation**

“I’m not going to lie. You know, I don’t use Cornell notes but I did start with that format my freshman year. I took it into my sophomore year and it helped me succeed in a lot of my challenging courses here at (university). But I think the overall reward of taking notes was the fact of just taking notes. Taking notes in whatever format you wanted to. Not only what’s on the PowerPoint but what makes sense to you as a person reading the notes later on.”

-Andrew

Another notable trend that can be drawn from the data is the theme of increasing self-agency. As novitiates of a sort in the AVID program, my participants devalued the knowledge being passed on to them in the form of Cornell notes and binder checks, tutorials and Socratic seminars. They initially saw the skills as tedious and unnecessary, particularly during their freshman and sophomore years but came to view them as indispensable, if not unchangeable, as high school went on and college began. As students, they began with resentment and compliance and developed toward appreciation and adaptation. McLaughlin (1976) describes “mutually adaptive process between the user and the institutional setting” (p. 172) when describing the then-novel approach of site-based reform efforts which gives a clear description of

what I interpret to be taking place in these participants and their evolving relationships with the various communities involved in their development.

This can also be seen in Andrew's experience as a public speaker. When he looked back on his address to the AVID summer convention and his subsequent appearances at district-wide staff development meetings, he appreciated having been pushed to participate in them. He went on to describe how that experience introduced him to professionals in the community and cemented for him the importance of cultivating a network of potential sponsors and mentors. Isabel also recounted having grave doubts about her ability to apply for, let alone win scholarships. When her teacher insisted, she complied but I consider her winning so many scholarships to be tied to her confidence and competence in analyzing her needs as a college student and successfully transferring to another university, traits which she relates developed during and very likely as a result of her participation in AVID.

The final trend I have identified in the experiences and perspectives of these participants is a fundamental shift in their understanding of themselves even if they are not yet at the point of being able to connect it to the underlying trends. For them, AVID began as a way to do better in school and then morphed into a way to get into college and pay for it. In college, they used the identities they had formed in AVID to forge ahead and create college-going selves (Butler, 2015a) who could be relied upon to meet deadlines, lead others, and collaborate productively. These identities stand rather clearly in contrast to the identities they brought into the program. If one were to sum it up as a takeaway, AVID could be said to have influenced these participants in the way they conceive of themselves which, in turn, affects the way they interact with the societal forces that see them as other and that would, under different circumstances, have led them to a markedly different outcome.

## Themes

Through the process of data analysis, triangulation and member checking, themes began to emerge from the data. It seemed that, for these participants, AVID had been a significant influence in their development as members of the communities they inhabited: their families, their AVID classes, their high schools, their school districts, their colleges and the professional fields which Andrew and Isabel were on the cusp of joining. Through interviews, emails and a participant conversation, they each shared with me their perspective on the experience they had had and the ways it had influenced their views and processes and had both helped shape a part of their identities and in some ways become a part of their identities both consciously and subconsciously. My analysis of the data suggests strongly to me that AVID had a definite influence on these participants. It might be reasonable, however, for a person who has not seen the data to trouble this conclusion. Could not other factors account for the changes in these students' views of their status as capable doers of deeds? Do not most adolescents' views of their capacities change over the course of their lives (Erikson, 1950)? While these questions are important to the data analysis, I consider the data to answer both in the negative. In the following section, I will explain some of the themes I identified and provide evidence from the data.

### **AVID, Potential and the Dominant Syntax**

“For AVID, you have to be selected in order to be in the course. So each one of us, I think we're all outgoing in some way. A lot of potential, I think that's why you get nominated to be in AVID.”

-Michael

From the outset, AVID students are recruited from the student population, generally by the school's AVID teacher and the school counseling staff. All of my participants related the

story of how they were selected to apply, interviewed and admitted to the program as an experience that made them feel as if they belonged and were capable of challenging academic work and college attendance. Michael recounted how her classmates not in AVID asked her if it was some sort of remedial class and how their esteem for her grew when she told them what actually happened in AVID class. She also noted, as did Isabel and Andrew, that having been selected for participation in AVID made them feel more positively about their potential than previously and that although they were aware that the demographics in their classes skewed disproportionately toward racial/ethnic minorities, they never viewed it as a stigma or as a slight against them.

The approach AVID takes to recruitment, selection and retention appears to have, in the case of my participants, raised their view of their own self-efficacy in a way that has been sustained over time and helped them situate themselves in the larger context of academic endeavor. Self-efficacy has been identified in the literature (Jackson, 2003) as being an impediment to the kind of secondary students AVID often recruits (AVID, 2013h). Jackson (2003) discusses peer pressure to adhere to modes of behavior and thought that align more closely with peers than with mentors and the educational system at large. In light of my data, it seems that this peer pressure is alleviated, the cause of which alleviation is open to further research. One thing I have observed over the progress of this work is how closely interwoven identity elements of intervention programs seem to be with teaching the participant to see herself as belonging to what Freire referred to as “the dominant syntax” (Literacy dot org., 2009). While inculcation of values, indeed in some cases indoctrination, is a feature of many types of training, in the case of my participants’ narratives, they did not feel that this shift was coercive or that it undervalued their own cultures. In fairness, the question was never posed directly and

participants only addressed it obliquely which suggests a need for further work on this area of academic/social intervention. The AVID recruitment process, at least in the perception of my participants, was a memorable element in their experience. They seemed to take being recruited and the requirement of an interview to proceed in enrolling as a compliment, which helped them when others had mistaken impressions about the nature of the program. It may be that other intervention programs utilize a similar recruitment process but if not, these findings suggest an argument for implementing one.

### **The Importance of Culture**

“I had taken homework with me to the family event. My parents didn’t agree with it but I felt like they finally saw the purpose of the program at the end once I graduated. I know my mom mentioned that (as) we were doing a prayer in the car on the way (to university), she basically thanked the Lord for the organization.”

-Isabel

As discussed in the preceding sections, culture is interwoven throughout the AVID experience. Taken broadly, I identified three cultures at interplay in my participants’ lives: college-going culture, the student’s home culture and the school culture in which they take AVID. My participants noted the interaction of the three cultures in their responses to questions about their perception of themselves, others’ perceptions of them and the adaptations that had been undertaken (and occurred without conscious effort). In their telling, they concluded their time in AVID at a considerable advantage compared in terms of their capacity for higher study to their capacity when they began. Throughout interviews, participant conversations and written responses, themes of *Big D Discourse*, language in its social connections and implications, (Gee,

1990) came up wherein participants noted emerging leadership, self-advocacy and boldness as well as changing standards for themselves and views of what they could indeed accomplish.

With regard to their home culture and their ongoing relevance therein, Tien and Andrew mentioned continuing obligations to their family members. Indeed, Tien took a break in the midst of our interview to pick up her younger sister from school. She seemed slightly embarrassed by the interruption but explained that it was simply the way of things in her family. The theme of contributing to family also emerged in discussions of working for pay. Some participants were still working, including Michael, Tien and Dahlia. Andrew and Isabel expressed slight discomfort at not contributing to the family financially but emphasized that it was not a factor in their decision to devote themselves full-time to their academic and job-finding activities. Multiple participants remarked on the difficulty their parents had in appreciating the time commitment their academic efforts required both in high school and college, especially considering that their parents' contemporaries often had children the same age who had entered the workforce directly from high school and were already bringing in an income that allowed them to contribute to their families' financial stability.

In terms of their high school culture, being somewhat apart from pre-AVID friends, putting in a lot of hours in academic work, taking pre-AP and AP classes kind of isolated them from their old friends. Some of them found new social networks in AVID (Isabel and Dahlia) while others (Tien and Michael) were more aloof. They became to an extent both protégé to and constructive critic of their AVID teachers, tutors and classmates. They developed a critical sense of the people in their worlds that does not appear to have been the case before. The extent to which of this was due to AVID and to what extent it can be attributed to a growing consciousness as a result of maturity is open to discussion but the clarity with which it appears in

the data argues for AVID. Speaking anecdotally as someone who has worked with thousands of teenagers, these participants' development of continual critical questioning seems uncommon.

By college-going culture, I refer to the academic skills and attitudes they learned as AVID students and which carried over, sometimes in modified form, to the college setting. Michael, Isabel and Dahlia mentioned making a point of attending professors' office hours and developing relationships with them, a practice they had learned in AVID. The rationale, by their telling, was to form some sort of connection even if only an awareness on the professor's part of what face belonged to their names so that in the event of either a difficulty or an opportunity presenting itself, the faculty member would have a basis for relating to the student. Michael and Isabel both recounted taking a proactive leadership position in forming and facilitating study and project groups. The oft-maligned group project having the downside of inconsistency among group members, Michael in particular had honed her ability to assess the likely roles each group member would play and to work either to limit the deleterious effects or to optimize the beneficial effects of group members' aptitudes. She had also put considerable thought into how to approach professors in the event that a student colleague was hampering her ability to be academically successful.

Moving from an interpersonal perspective to an individual one, notions of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973) emerged. Artifacts of college-going culture such as meticulous keeping of organized schedules, the maintenance of definite procedures for processing and cataloguing notes, correspondence and academic work were evident in all participants, likely reflecting the assumption of AVID's college-oriented curriculum. Also evident was a developed sense of acuity in calculating the risks and rewards, say of taking a course from one professor versus another or joining one professional association and declining to join another. Also internalized

was the perception of the value of university study relative to attending a community college. Michael and Isabel both expressed disappointment at peers who had gone on to the latter and were saddened but not surprised by the rate at which their acquaintances who had opted to go to community college failed to complete degrees.

Taken together, both the internal and external aspects of these college students' identities and the admixture of AVID's intent and the reality of its outcomes seems to have produced in these people a sense that they can belong in multiple worlds without neglecting or having antipathy toward any. Viewed through the lens of Foucault's (1965) admonition that we often do not know what what" we do does, the influence of AVID in the lives of these participants would be difficult to discern through quantitative means alone but can be seen through analysis of the narratives they give of their experience with the program and locations where it has played out.

### **Rigor with Support**

"They would give us challenge problems for the chapter and sometimes I just could not get a way to solve the problem and the tutors were able to help me think about things in a different way to kind of open up my thinking."

-Dahlia

From the beginning of Mary Catherine Swanson's curriculum for her high school's new student demographic in Santa Barbara in the late 1970's, the central tenet of AVID is to provide students with rigorous academic experiences while also ensuring that they have and are taught to use an array of support practices and resources (Swanson et al., 2000). My conversations and emails with my participants, graduates of her program, led me to conclude that to a great extent this was their experience. It remains to be seen to what extent this would have been true of their classmates but the literature suggests that it is fairly widespread (Watt, Huerta & Alkan, 2011).

The changes described by these AVID alumni over the course of their time in the program and at the university suggest it is accurate to say that they took more challenging coursework than they would have had they not been encouraged to do so and supported in the endeavor by their AVID teachers. It is further accurate to point out that practices such as Socratic seminars and tutorials were things they considered elements of their academic and socioemotional growth. In light of the data, AVID can be said to have influenced the way students and their families and peers viewed them as participants in the K-20 learning process.

### **Family Atmosphere**

“Well, it was really nice because there was a family – it – we felt like a family in that class. And so, I guess I grew into who I am.”

-Michael

“They’re very close... but not to me.”

-Tien

Each participant described, in one way or another, a family atmosphere in their AVID classes. This sense of family was fostered by and included their AVID teachers. Those educators’ efforts helped to teach them concrete skills like Cornell note taking or rendering seemingly intractable challenges as a solvable issue through the use of a series of procedures as in Socratic seminars and tutorial requests. They also taught them more intuitive skills such as leadership and productive collaboration and exposed them to opportunities to grow as speakers, tutors and organizational leaders. Through this support, participants came to see themselves as capable, indeed entitled to the opportunity to partake in challenging coursework. While participants like Dahlia and Isabel had some trepidation about beginning their undergraduate journey and others like Michael underwent changes in their major focus, they all expressed a

sense of being well-prepared and supported by their AVID teachers, tutors and to an extent, their peers. These transitions, which the participants related to the influence of family atmosphere were, from a poststructuralist point of view, pressure from an external source that became internalized and in turn was adapted and adopted by participants for their use beyond the AVID classroom. This phenomenon, as suggested by Tien's observation above, was not universal but in this case, the exception seems to bolster the rule. She observed that having entered AVID during her senior year in high school, she did not have the longstanding relationships her classmates did and as the only Asian and the only student without a smartphone, there existed a divide between her and her classmates that sharpened her focus on the closeness they shared, albeit not with her.

### **Confidence and Agency**

“We were growing with each other here.”

-Michael

From the “shy puppy” character of Michael's early days in AVID to Andrew's presentations to audiences of thousands, the people who spoke to me indicated that they had developed attitudes of confidence and views on the importance of networking and advocating for one's needs in the college environment during their time in AVID. I believe on this basis that one of the important elements of the influence of AVID on identity formation in those I spoke to has been on their beliefs about what they were capable of doing intellectually and what steps they would need to learn to take in order to reach that intellectual potential and to turn intellectual accomplishment into a college degree and from there into a career they considered meaningful and a level of financial comfort that they viewed as sufficient. A recurring notion in the data was the importance of connections to others in their major fields and the industries

supplied with talent by them. Meeting with professors, taking formal and informal leadership positions and forging ties both with those willing to help them advance and those in need of their help seem to be practices born of their time in AVID and its influence on them.

## **Findings**

Taken together, the preceding themes emerged from a narrative inquiry form of analysis informed by Butler and Foucault's thinking on the nature of influence and performativity of identity. These themes, drawn from the narratives of each of the participants lead in turn to an overarching narrative of the ways they perceive AVID to have informed how they consciously and unconsciously interact with the world around them, specifically as it relates to their progress through an undergraduate degree. That narrative begins during the recruitment and selection process and continues through high school, matriculation and the undergraduate experience. In relating this narrative, the intent is to layer participant recollection with theoretical perspective to provide a textual description of how the two interact and how they can be seen to have formed the identities described by the participants and understood by the researcher. To do this, it seems appropriate to see findings in terms of relationships. These relationships occur, as one might imagine, between individuals and groups but of importance to the poststructural theoretical foundation of this research, they also occur between individuals and institutions like the home culture, the university, the high school and the mainstream American culture (to the extent such a thing can be described as a monolithic entity).

In reviewing the data and bringing its meaning into focus for the purpose of answering the research question, I find that AVID's influence on identity formation begins with the selection process and the relationships that exist between program participants and their peers, families, school communities and home cultures. Multiple participants cited the experience of

being invited, interviewed and selected for enrollment in AVID. They also described a process of acculturation to the AVID way of performing school and the rigidity of the ways they were expected to adhere to it. From Cornell notes to binder checks to tutorial request forms, participants recall a strict regime which they bridled against in the beginning but which they ultimately worked into their perceptions of the actions of a successful college student. This entrée into the world of AVID and their acceptance of its precepts led them to challenge themselves through enrolling in multiple Advanced Placement courses and choosing to pursue university study as opposed to career or community college. It also led to a certain amount of conflict with those not initiated into the culture of AVID. Their peers and parents were confused and troubled at times about the goals and requirements of the identities their friends or children in AVID were taking up which resulted, at times, in conflict and alienation but which also tended to resolve once the results of taking up the AVID student identity became clear.

The influence of AVID, having begun with recruitment and developed through the taking of the course and learning the program's precepts continues with the matriculation process and the acts involved in proceeding through the undergraduate process. My participants shed light on the ways AVID influenced them to aspire to university study and eschew full-time employment or community college matriculation even when it put them at odds with the expectation of their families and non-AVID friends. They also described their work as AVID tutors in schools located near their universities. From newcomers to adherents and now to working as a part of the program itself, their identities have developed from aspirant to practitioner to a sort of preceptorship in their work with middle and high school students. While any identity is made up of innumerable influences, regarding the experiences shared by these participants through the lens of Butler's idea of performativity leaves me with the impression

that AVID has influenced them to be more confident, more aggressive in pursuit of their goals and in self-advocacy, more organized, more intentional and more outgoing as students and as peers than is likely to be explained by other phenomena reported.

It seems fair to say that this finding could have been anticipated based on the literature review accompanying the present research. Based on AVID's own research (AVID 2013b, 2013k, 2013l), it can be seen as a means of increasing its participants' cultural capital, not least in terms of their aspirations and expectations surrounding higher education. This research is also supported by the work coming out of the University of Texas Pan America, which has developed a significant body of work. The work of Lozano, Watt & Huerta (2009), Watt, Huerta and Lozano (2007) and Mendiola, Watt, and Huerta (2010) found that that perceptions and behaviors attributable to having been in AVID were present in the students they studied and resulted in increases in metrics associated with success in high school and higher education. Based on my own analysis and on a comparison of what has been learned by my research with what others in the field have developed in theirs, I am comfortable presenting these findings.

### **Implications of the Present Research**

In reviewing the data, the themes that have emerged from it and the narrative that emerged from those themes, a recurring notion is that the participants in this research as well as my less-formal consultations bear out Foucault's (1961) thoughts on our awareness of what we do does and Butler's overall refutation of the doer behind the deed. These young adults enrolled in much more than a class. They enrolled in a culture. In much the same way European Americans attempted to better the condition of the indigenous peoples of this country by giving them entrée into some aspect of its economic process by teaching them trades, those behind

AVID have attempted to provide youths at opportunity with an on-ramp to the kinds of skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary to engage with higher education.

I consider it appropriate to draw a line connecting the efforts of the two groups on the basis of their intent. The way in which the programs went about manifesting their intent vary widely, though. Where the Indian school movement sought to exterminate the Native culture and way of life and replace it with what was then positivistically considered the right way to be a part of American life, AVID, as reported by participants, sought instead to add first a skillset and then a mindset to young people's take on the world. To again view things diachronically, as they have evolved over time, this implies a certain growth in educators' understanding of the needs of minority communities as they relate to the larger society. This growth appears in the participants' description of their relationships with the people, groups, cultures and institutions in their lives. It is also apparent in the ways they describe their various selves acting, reacting and interacting. To analyze this dataset through the lense of Butler's thinking is, for me, to see the complexity and malleability of the self as it interacts with experience and cognition, both conscious and unconscious. While considering my participants as the people present both in my conversations with them, in the transcripts and in their writing, I am mindful both of their words and their meanings. For as many times as they described some practice or experience as a bother, they just as frequently pointed to the same practice or experience as something that helped form them as they formed themselves.

A further implication of this research is that where young men and women of color are concerned, there is an acute awareness of what is taking place in their educators' attempts to help them grow as members of the larger society in a way that does not appear in the literature on Native life in the twentieth century. These AVID participants and college students sought to

live with a foot in both worlds, that of their home culture and that of the university. It is unknown how this process is playing out as they transition from higher education to the job market but at least in the moment they expressed themselves to me, they valued both aspects of their lives enough to take steps to remain connected to them and to regret missed opportunities in both. That they felt empowered to do so by their AVID teachers suggests that such additive forms of cultural education are possible when practiced intentionally.

### **Summary**

Over the course of this chapter, I have described the narratives of my participants' perceptions of their experience as members of their home, high school and college communities. I have identified themes relating to the importance of recruitment, culture as a component of identity formation, the notion of rigor with support, a pervasive sense of family/community in AVID classes and its concomitant influence participants' sense of confidence in their role as doers of their identities and the attendant growth in their own sense of agency as well as the development of behaviors around advocating for themselves. I have also explored the multiple selves that have arisen as these participants grew up with the influence of AVID in their lives. In the next chapter, I will discuss my conclusions, implications for theory and practice and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

This research was inspired by my father's recounting of his childhood as a young Native American growing up in the 1940's and 1950's and coming of age and confronting the white business world in the 1960's and 1970's. Between what he related and what I have been able to explore and corroborate through my own research, I reached a conflicted view of the efforts of the educators and other adults in his life to teach him the skills and mindset he would use to, as he might put it, beat the white man at his own game. As a classroom teacher who currently works for the most part with economically disadvantaged Latinx youth, programs that enable young people of color to compete in a society dominated by those who are unlike them and may be unsympathetic to their needs are of great interest to me. Combining these two interests with an encounter with the AVID program and the poststructuralist writing of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault among others, I began to wonder how the forces of education, culture and self-perception might intermingle to create an identity. As this conundrum percolated in my mind, I sought to distill it into a single question. Because identity from a poststructuralist point of view, in particular Butler and Foucault's perspective, is constructed as a fluid outcome of a myriad of internal and external influences and considerations, I decided to investigate the following question: how do college students who have completed two years of post-secondary education

perceive AVID to have influenced the way they perform their identities as learners and as members of their cultural group?

### **Theoretical Foundations**

This question goes to what I consider the crux of the matter of identity formation and sense-making of the societies in which we seek to exist. If we can better understand the purposively sampled participants, we can make progress in understanding some of the outcomes of intervention programs like AVID. Building on the work of Foucault, Butler proposes an effort to move the thinking about identity, proceeding from gender identity and the notion of the self, beyond positivistic stimulus/response models of behavior prediction and modification into a more inclusive and comprehensive phase.

Foucault's work in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) forms a part of the foundation of Butler's conception of performativity through his description of the internal and external seats of power in relation to the conscious subject (Ennis, 2008). If we expand our vision of the law as it is portrayed in *Discipline and Punish* to include such things as gender norms and taboos regarding homosexuality and incest, then we might also use that vision to examine the set of prohibitions and requirements enforced by outside actors as well as the internalized and assumed priorities of the individual. What Foucault proposes in terms of dual centers of control are at the heart of Butler's description of reciprocal yet asymmetric power dynamics.

Butler, for her part has taken Foucault's power arrangement and applied it more specifically to gender roles as "performatives [that] are presented as both corporeal acts and signifying practices which, constrained by power, fabricate the sexed body and gender identity through processes of repetition" (Ennis, 2008 p. 68). It is my stance that such "corporeal acts and signifying processes" exist in realms of human relations besides gender identity and that

indeed these performatives and the values placed both within and outside the individual are the bases for the identity we construct.

### **Triangulation**

Qualitative researchers are rightly concerned about the quality of their interpretations of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). One of the most significant steps I have undertaken in the course of the present research is to employ methods of triangulation in my analysis in order to increase the likelihood that an emergent theme or a finding is supported by multiple data points. This proved feasible with the data I collected in part, I believe because of the fidelity with which schools are strongly encouraged to implement AVID. Given that practices and beliefs shared with students were describe as roughly the same across schools, teachers and time periods, as well as being described as relatively homogeneous in the literature (Watt et al., 2002, Watt et al., 2004, Watt et al., 2010a), it was not a surprise to find that participants' accounts correlated on a number of points. What was more unexpected from my point of view was the similarity of experience with other students and adults, both family and non-family, inside and out of the AVID program. I was also struck by the experiences multiple participants shared of having become more aggressive as self-advocates and leaders. The appearance of these trends in multiple data points in both in-person oral data and written data in response to written questions as well as the analysis being supported by member checks suggests that the analysis of participant narratives was of sufficient quality to develop accurate and meaningful themes and findings.

### **A Human Science**

The fields of narrative inquiry and poststructuralist theories are, from their outset, interested in human experience and the interpretation and telling thereof. In particular, Butler

looks at the difficulty of defining life as a person in the world in terms of autonomy and influence. Because we are all both subjects and objects simultaneously in her thinking (Butler, 2015), the imperatives of who we are, who we wish to be and what others wish us to be or not to be impinge on the way our selves are constructed. In that case, then, it is perhaps worth examining some of the roles that exist in an AVID program.

The participants in this study, along with my informal informants (teachers, administrators and non-participant AVID students) provided valuable insight into different components of the AVID experience from recruitment and selection up to college attendance. The students (participant and non-participant) themselves reported on their perceived benefits and drawbacks of AVID's program. It seems fair to say that it is indeed an intention process of molding student practices and beliefs about themselves and others from a place of potential to a place of action and ultimately a place of attainment of an undergraduate degree. The changes that take place across this span of time can be described as a sort of shaping, of first learning information and practices and then applying them, in increasingly independent ways to the performance of school. Teachers who work with AVID students share both an intense devotion to their students and a willingness to devote whatever resources are needed to achieving the goals of the program for them. Long hours spent helping complete college and financial aid applications, enduring the ire of students' resistance to Cornell notes and binder checks and making do with limited resources seem to be their stock in trade. These educators are not perfect by any means, nor are they uniformly virtuous. They are also not the only professionals in a school building with students' best interests in mind. That said, the AVID teachers of my acquaintance as well as those described by the participants in this study do can be described as

exceptionally adept at helping their charges accomplish academic progress that may have been considerably less likely in their absence.

### **The Researcher as a Consideration**

The search for meaningful, useful insight through qualitative research benefits from an acknowledgement that each researcher brings her or his own set of influences to the process of the research. From its design to its execution to its analysis, the essence of the researcher's thoughts and beliefs as well as behaviors and demeanor can exert themselves on the course of the study. In this case, I believe it is important to note some factors I considered relevant to the process. For one, interactions between researchers and participants set the tone for data collection. Not only did my appearance and behavior play a role in this. In my first two interviews, I had a more detached, utilitarian view of my participants. Between those conversations and the ones held subsequently, I attended the American Educational Research Association's annual meeting in San Antonio and met Ming Fang He, a well-known scholar in the field. I asked her help in recruiting participants and she shared with me that she looked at participants as friends, and was indeed quite close over a period of years with some of hers. By adopting this approach, I believe that my subsequent participants fed off a different sort of energy than my early ones. Indeed, Andrew, who seems naturally outgoing to begin with was positively effusive in his interactions with me. Both his statements about recollections and the insights he had while we were talking one on one and in the participant conversation with Isabel seemed to take on an energy that his written responses lacked. As a practicing teacher, I have seen this sort of behavior in students as well as these participants. Based on the way they perceive me and I them as well as what we know or believe about one another, we adjust our

interactional style reciprocally. Butler herself would tell us that it is difficult to make clear attributions of a specific factor to behavior but I believe based on a preponderance of the evidence that the way I presented myself as a scholar and an interlocutor had an influence on the type of interaction I had with my participants.

### **Culture Before and After**

In interacting with my participants, I observed a striking similarity in the way they thought of themselves pre- and post-AVID and the way my father related perceiving himself pre- and post-Bacone Indian School. In speaking with both, I noted a respect for their heritage culture commingled with an understanding that their entrée into the world of higher education would not come from their families. My participants did not evince any particular angst about this situation, merely gratitude that they had come across people who could and would help them. There seemed to be a realization that their home cultures as practiced during their early childhood, while still a positive factor in their lives, were no longer sufficient for the lives they currently wished to lead. Their elders did not possess the understanding necessary to pursue the vocations of college-educated middle-class people at relative ease with the power structure in place in our society. They did, however, possess a concern for their children's well-being and an open mindedness about what might be a necessary sacrifice even if they did not entirely understand the reason for it.

While my participants did not note angst per se, they were aware of a tension between their home cultures and those they pursued in the academic aspects of their lives. All endeavored to explain that their parents supported their goals, by and large, but were unable to understand for themselves the means needed to achieve them. To a greater or lesser extent,

however, they were willing to proceed on the basis of trust in their children that the sacrifices being demanded were worthwhile.

In addition to their academic workload, a number of participants engaged in other forms of work. All had worked at points as AVID tutors and Michael and Tien held restaurant jobs as well. Andrew participated in Rotary International as a way of self-advocacy via networking and Isabel took a leadership role in a multicultural academic sorority as a way of building her résumé and developing her leadership skills and credentials. The data provided by each of the participants suggested to me that they were able to use their AVID experience as a springboard to further their larger objective positioning themselves favorably to enter the workforce as degreed professionals. I interpret this as an indicator that their experience in AVID has indeed influenced the way they see themselves acting in the world.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

Implications for theory include support for the notion that narrative inquiry is a valuable means of getting at both the large and the small influences on human behavior. The poststructuralist emphasis on the seen/unseen, conscious/unconscious duality in influence on the part of the agent and the society he inhabits, the reciprocity of it, which is fundamental to Derrida (1978), Foucault (2010) and Butler (1990, 2015b) and which was the basis for this research appeared in the narratives of these five college students. This understanding of human identity formation during the liminal stages of adolescence and early adulthood offers an opportunity to better understand poststructuralist theories as well as contribute to their development over time. It stands to reason that further exploration of the themes brought forth in this study will lead to the furtherance of the field's understanding of the components of identity formation and the reciprocal nature of power therein. In terms of academic practice, some

foundation in the process by which at-opportunity students make their way to the higher education classroom and community will benefit the academic seeking to promote social equity and help students fulfill their ambitions. Further, the lessons of this type of research have implications for practice in schools. Heeding the value participants found in the practices and tenets of AVID as well as the interpretation of their experience as part of their identity-making process would be of value to K-12 as well as higher education practitioners.

### Quality Considerations

In an effort to ensure rigor throughout this study I performed careful collection and analysis of the data in light of the principles of narrative inquiry described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Of paramount importance to me was bringing a high level of credibility to my analysis of my participants' perceptions. As part of the effort to achieve this, I conducted member checks and made adjustments to the analysis and text as warranted as a means of ensuring that my interpretation of the participants' voices was in keeping with the intent of their responses. I further employed triangulation techniques in an effort to compare different types of data and evaluate emerging themes. In addition to semi-structured one-on-one interviews, I convened a participant conversation and solicited written responses via email to questions similar to those in the interview protocol (Appendices A-C) but meant to probe the themes more deeply as participants had greater time to reflect on the questions. All five participants offered their thoughts in writing and the overall impression both strengthened and clarified my analysis of our spoken interaction. Because I intend to revisit this research and apply the lessons learned from it in my future practice as an investigator, I will maintain the data itself in digital and hard copy for one year after the awarding of my Ph.D. degree. Following destruction of the data per my application to the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board, I will maintain my

notes on its analysis and the contact information of my participants in order to solicit their further participation in future research.

### **Limitations**

While this study was successful in bringing together the voices of those who had been a part of AVID in high school and completed at least two years of study in higher education, it is worth pointing out that a number of the experiences and perceptions were somewhat homogeneous. It is reasonable, in my estimation, to wonder if this is due to the emphasis that AVID Center places on carrying out the program with fidelity, similarities in AVID teachers and programs, or some characteristic of the participants as selected by the researcher. It is also true that four of the five participants were Latinx and the other Asian. No white students participated and indeed, speaking anecdotally on the basis of my own experience with AVID classes and on the basis of AVID's own data (2013h), they seem to be underrepresented in the program. The perspectives and themes I identified speak to a meaningful influence by AVID on these students but their experience may not be typical, as the study's snowball sampling method provided only students who had continued to maintain some contact with their former AVID teachers. This may, in turn, have resulted in hearing only from students whose AVID experience had been positive or which they considered to have been particularly useful in their college lives. In my review of the literature and in reflecting on the voices most frequently heard in this type of research,

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

I believe that an implication for further research would be the advisability of studying AVID alumni of European descent as well as a look at the work the program is doing in rural, industrial and exurban communities. In an era when there seems to be a significant disconnect

between urban/suburban and rural communities, I would be interested to know what bridges a program like AVID would be able to build at the district and state levels as well as in college communities. Further, this study could be seen as a sort of victory narrative as all the participants recounted significant influences on the part of AVID in their lives as students and as members of multiple communities. I believe that this is largely due to the purposive sampling and the homogeneity of this aspect of the participants' experiences does not take away its conclusions. That being said, understanding diverse experiences is generally considered a good thing and so I would recommend further study with a different participant pool, perhaps students who took AVID and were unable to persist in higher education or those who took AVID but left the program. A final recommendation, and one I am considering, is a longitudinal look at these participants' experiences as they complete their undergraduate degrees and move into the next phases of their lives. Whether they go into their fields, another field, continue with graduate school or some combination of these, there would be value in checking back in with them to see, perhaps, how they applied the themes mentioned in this research to their future endeavors and even to their interactions with their own eventual children.

## **Summary**

This study began with the desire to explore poststructuralist theories of influence and counter-influence in narratives of identity formation told by people who had taken Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) as an elective class in high school and achieved sufficient progress in higher education as to have persisted through at least two years of study. Through interviews, emails and a participant conversation with five such participants, I was, through narrative inquiry, able to identify as themes the importance of the recruitment process to the student, access to cultures at home, in the high school and at the university, the provision of

academic rigor paired with relevant academic support, a family atmosphere of loyalty, encouragement and friendly competition and the students' development of a heightened sense of confidence in their identities as community members and their ability to influence the events in their lives.

To bring the present research full circle, it might be advisable to return to the experience that was the inspiration for it, that of a young Choctaw boy growing up with his grandparents on land for which their ancestors had traded their homeland and which had been taken again and parceled back out by a government representative of a society disinterested in at best and often hostile to the development of people like himself. My father, known to his family as Man, saw the opportunity to learn the Discourse of the dominant syntax as his way out of the underclass. In adhering to its principles and finding ways to work around its strictures, he recast his lot and those of his descendants. Just as there have been syntaxes of power and syntaxes of oppression since earliest civilization, they exist today. The people who participated in this work were recruited by the agents of a program meant to give them access to power without denigrating their home culture. In the process, they developed a deeper understanding of how who they are influences what they do and vice versa. They embodied that understanding in the practices and beliefs that have enabled them to be successful in K-20 education, and in their families and home communities. It remains to be seen how they will translate this experience and in any event it would be well beyond the realm of this study but were I to imagine, I would imagine a story Man could recognize and appreciate.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Question 1: Could you describe the people in your AVID class, both students and teachers?

Follow-Up: If necessary, the participant may be asked to describe classmates, teachers, AVID tutors and other adults in terms of their age, apparent gender, race/ethnicity, family income, perceived level of academic participation, or other descriptors they consider relevant.

Question 2: What difference, if any, do you think your experience in AVID made in the way you approach the way you do things?

Follow-Up: If no difference is noted, the participant may be asked about specific times, places, and experiences in AVID as a means of stirring a memory of some difference to suggest that no such memory exists.

Question 3: Could you describe the way you felt about yourself as a college student before, during, and after your time in AVID?

Follow-Up: If a participant needs more specificity, I may offer the examples of attitudes toward classes, expectations of academic efficacy, comparisons to others, ideas they may have gotten while in AVID.

Question 4: Thinking about the things you did in your AVID class, what were some things that held a lot of value for you and what were some things you didn't value as much?

Follow-Up: If the participant does not recall anything of particular value or anything they felt was of less value, they may be asked about specific aspects of the program such as tutoring or Cornell notes as a way of jogging memory.

Question 5: What were your relationships like with the other students in the class?

Follow-Up: Looking back on the experience, how do you think they influenced you and/or you influenced them?

Question 6: What adults do you remember from the program? What were their roles? What kind of interactions did you have?

Follow-Up: Who were some of your favorite and less favorite adults in the program? How would you describe the things (good or bad) they tried to teach you? What did you learn (to do or not to do) from them?

Question 7: How did/do your family and friends feel about you taking AVID?

Follow-Up: How did you learn about AVID?

Question 8: How would describe your approach to deciding what classes to take in high school or college? What lessons from AVID would you say you applied to that process?

Follow-Up: Did being in AVID have any influence on the way you pick your classes or how difficult a class you thought you could handle?

Question 9: When you think about your time in high school and making the transition to college, how did you learn about what to do and how to do it in order to progress in school?

Follow-Up: When you find yourself having trouble in school, whom do you turn to for help, if anyone? Why?

Question 10: Overall, how do you see AVID as part of your journey through high school?

Follow-Up: If the participant cannot recall any aspect of AVID as having been a part of their educational experience, it may be worth revisiting question 4 and asking which of those experiences may have been intended to help the student grow and in what ways.

## Appendix B: Participant conversation Protocol

Questions will be similar to the following and initially posed to the group at large and the conversation will be allowed to develop freely. The investigator will moderate the discussion and redirect off-topic commentary as needed.

Question 1: Who were your favorite people in A.V.I.D. and why?

Question 2: Who were your least favorite people in A.V.I.D. and why?

Question 3: What are some things you had in common with other students in those classes? What were some differences?

Question 4: How would you compare the students in your A.V.I.D. classes to the student body in general? How were they the same or different?

Question 5: Who were the adults in your A.V.I.D. class and what did they do?

Question 6: What are some examples of things you learned in your A.V.I.D. classes and how do you feel they've applied to your life?

Question 7: If you could go back and speak to your A.V.I.D. class as a guest speaker, which year would you choose and what would you say?

Question 8: What are some examples of ways people benefit from A.V.I.D.?

Question 9: Can you tell me about how you decided to go to college?

Question 10: Is there anything I should have asked but did not?

## Appendix C: E-Mail Follow-Up Questions

When you were learning about college and making the transition from high school to college, say from Junior year to the end of Freshman year, what do you see as the factors that influenced you? That's a big question on purpose. I'd like you to answer it any way that makes sense to you.

What are some influences on the way you approach school now? They could be anything. I'm curious about how you decide to handle things nowadays.

What are some things that affect what you do or affected what you did both in high school and college? It doesn't matter if they relate to AVID or not.

## Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Approval

### Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, March 22, 2017  
IRB Application No ED179  
Proposal Title: IDENTITY AND THE AVID LEARNER: PARTICIPATION IN  
ADVANCEMENT VIA INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION CLASS AND  
PARTICIPANT PERFORMATIVITY  
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 3/21/2020**

Principal Investigator(s):  
Jonathan Baker Pamela Brown  
237 Willard  
Stillwater, OK 74078 Stillwater, OK 74078

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

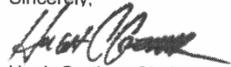
The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Hugh Crethar, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

## VITA

Jonathan Lee Baker

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: IDENTITY AND THE A.V.I.D. LEARNER:

PARTICIPATION IN ADVANCEMENT VIA INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION CLASS  
AND PARTICIPANT PERFORMATIVITY

Major Field: Education

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2018

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language/Bilingual Education at University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 2008

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in French Education at University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, 1998

Experience:

French Teacher, Bryan Adams High School, Dallas, Texas 2017-Present  
French Teacher, Lake Highlands High School, Dallas, Texas 2012-2014  
French Teacher, Southmoore High School, Moore, Oklahoma 2008-2012  
French Teacher, Westmoore High School, Moore, Oklahoma 2001-2008  
French Teacher, Brink Junior High School, Moore, Oklahoma 1998-2001

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Texas Foreign Language Association  
American Educational Research Association (AERA)  
American Association for Curriculum and Teaching (AACT)