Serious Students and Good Girls: Differential Achievement and the Negotiation of Identities Among Middle School Latinas

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior whose grace and mercy provided me with the strength to see this journey through.
ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Education
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Dr. Begoña Echeverria, Co-Chairperson
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The differential achievement between White students and underrepresented minority students is not a matter easily explained by attending to just one factor such as socioeconomic status or race. Research suggests that racial, ethnic, class, and gender identity constructs impact students’ schooling experiences and academic achievement (Ayala, 2006; Akom, 2008; Bettie, 2003; Carter, 2006; Carter 2008; Connell, 1993; Finders, 1997; Fine, 1993; Fordham, 1993; Gallegos-Castillo, 2006; Hartman, 2006; Lopez, 2006; Matute-Bianchi, 2008; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; O’Connor, 2001; Romo, L.F., Kouyoumdjian, C., Nadeem, E., Sigman, M., 2006; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993; Weis, 1993; and Zentella, 1997). The implications of differential academic achievement reach far beyond the confines of K-12 schooling, impacting college graduation rates, fields of study and degree completion, and employment and pay opportunities (Landivar, 2013).

The purpose of my investigation was to capture young Latinas’ understandings of their schooling experiences in order to explain the processes by which they became high- or low- achieving students, particularly in STEM related subjects such as 8th grade
General Physical Science and Honors Science. The study focused on six middle school, 8th grade Latina students, their teachers, and parents to uncover what it meant for these girls to be successful and how recognition of certain social identities (Institution, Discourse, and Affinity) (Gee, 2000) mediated their academic achievement. Few studies have addressed differential academic achievement among middle school Latinas and none through the perspective of social identity theory (Burke and Stets, 2009; Gee, 2000; Jenkins, 2008). I utilized qualitative research methods, including observations and interviews, to gather data to inform this study. Themes were determined based on repetitive instances of specific dialogue and behaviors of girls enacting, and others recognizing, social identities that could be viewed with the identity lens as outlined by Gee (2000) and Burke and Stets (2009).

I found that Honors AVID Latinas and General AVID Latinas achieved different academic outcomes due to enacted behaviors and recognition of those behaviors. Honors AVID Latinas intentionally negotiated academic behaviors associated with recognition as serious students, which meant being present and future goal-oriented. How parents, teachers, and peers recognized Honors AVID Latinas as serious students hinged on the work involved in maintaining this multifaceted social identity. General AVID Latinas enacted behaviors associated with recognition as good students and good girls, which meant doing well in school, being well behaved, and being future oriented. Their parents, however, privileged social behavior over academics and, therefore, recognized their daughters’ enactments of good student as good girl performances. Through this recognition, the two groups of girls achieved different academic outcomes.
Overview of Chapters

The first chapter provides an explanation of the problem of differential achievement among underrepresented minorities and a background on the existing body of research addressing this topic. The second chapter consists of a review of the scholarly literature that has addressed the issue of differential achievement. Chapter Two explains the social identity conceptual framework used to guide the analysis of data collected. Chapter Three describes the study design and methods used to collect and analyze data. To answer my research questions, I drew upon observational and interview data from my focal students, their parents and teachers. For this study, I borrowed from Gee’s identity categories (Gee, 2000) and Jenkins’ social identity theory (Jenkins, 2008) to inform my analysis of 8th grade Latinas’ identity performances in school and their parents’, peers’, and teachers’ recognitions of them to understand how they came achieve differently as Honors AVID or General AVID students. To do so, I examined how their academic achievements were mediated by their social identities.

Chapter Four presents and explains my findings for Honors AVID Latinas. In this chapter, I argue that Honors AVID Latinas intentionally negotiated schooling experiences and carefully chose to enact the preferred behaviors associated with being perceived as a serious student. For Honors AVID Latinas, serious student meant being present and future goal-oriented. These girls performed much like the Mexican-descent group of students Matute-Bianchi (2008) described as Mexican-oriented students that were “achievement-oriented and goal-oriented”, enrolled in advanced courses, earned above
average grades, and maintained regular attendance (p. 417). Honors AVID Latinas gained recognition as serious students from parents, teachers, and peers.

In Chapter Five I present and explain my findings for General AVID Latinas. I contend that General AVID Latinas performed as good students because they perceived that doing so fit their parents’ expectations. For these girls, their interpretation of good student meant doing well in school, being well behaved, and being future oriented. While, General AVID Latinas performed as good students, they gained recognition as good girls from parents and teachers. The complex relationship between performance and recognition set the stage for the negotiation of a dual identity, which further distinguished these girls from their Honors AVID counterparts.

In both Chapters Four and Five, I argue that through intentional negotiation and recognition of certain social identities, Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas were able to gain recognition as certain types of people (Gee, 2000); serious students and good students and good girls, and in doing so achieved different levels of academic achievement.

Finally, Chapter Six includes a discussion of the significance of these findings and recommendations for further research. In this chapter, I argue that the findings of this study have implications for what teachers should know about the complexity of pro-academic identities. Based on my findings, it is clear that pro-academic identities do not look the same among 8th grade Latina students and, therefore, it is imperative that teachers become aware of the factors that influence pro-academic identity performances such as present and future goal orientation and familial and institutional expectations. My
findings also raise issues regarding students’ access to resources within untracking programs such as AVID. Moreover, I suggest that future research on the academic achievement of underrepresented minorities from the perspective of identity performance and recognition may serve to further understand how these students reach varying levels of academic achievement. In this way, my investigation contributes not only to the scholarly literature on differential student achievement but also to practitioners’ (i.e., teachers and administrators) understandings of how Latinas’ identity performances mediate academic achievement.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long debated the factors that lead to differential academic achievement between dominant groups and underrepresented minorities. Research suggests that racial, ethnic, class, and gender identity constructs impact students’ schooling experiences and academic achievement (Ayala, 2006; Akom, 2008; Bettie, 2003; Carter, 2006; Connell, 1993; Finders, 1997; Fine, 1993; Fordham, 1993; Gallegos-Castillo, 2006; Hartman, 2006; Lopez, 2006; Matute-Bianchi, 2008; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; O’Connor, 2001; Romo, L.F., Kouyoumdjian, C., Nadeem, E., Sigman, M., 2006; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993; and Zentella, 1997), however, little work has been done with regard to in-group variation of student achievement and even fewer studies address that of adolescent Latinas in middle school (Matute-Bianchi, 2008; O’Connor, 2001; Orenstein, 1994; Valdés, 1996).

Background

The differential achievement between White students and underrepresented minority students is not a matter easily explained by attending to just one factor such as socioeconomic status or race. The implications of differential academic achievement reach far beyond the confines of K-12 schooling, impacting college graduation rates, fields of study and degree completion, and employment and pay opportunities (Landivar, 2013; Nord, C., Roey, S., Perkins, R., Lyons, M., Lemanski, N., Brown, J., and Schuknecht, J., 2011). Approximately 20% of employed Latinas are college graduates compared to 38% White women, a gap that increased nearly 4% between 2000 and 2011 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). 63% of employed Latinas work in lower-paying
service occupations and sales and office occupations (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). Conversely, “women who work in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields (STEM) earn on average 33 % more than their counterparts in other fields” (www.whitehouse.gov). Although women hold nearly half of all the jobs in the U.S. economy, they hold only 26% of STEM jobs (Landivar, 2013; Jacobs et al., 1998) with Latina women comprising 2% of STEM jobs (National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2013). Not surprisingly, a 2009 study of high-school transcripts across the country revealed that Latino high-school students were only missing the science requirements needed to achieve a standard curriculum level\(^1\) (Nord et al. 2011). This finding further supports the premise that Latino students are at a disadvantage for entering STEM careers upon leaving high school.

Furthermore, “[w]omen’s underrepresentation in STEM is a result of their significant underrepresentation in engineering and computer occupations, rather than math and science occupations” (Landivar, 2013, p. 5). Women’s employment in STEM careers is primarily concentrated in social science where they hold 61% of positions, followed by 47% of mathematical workers, 41% of life and physical scientists, 27% of computer professionals, and 13% of engineers (Landivar, 2013). “Although women are 53 percent of college graduates, they are 41 percent of science and engineering  

\(^1\) According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), curriculum levels are defined as follows: Standard- At least four credits of English and three each in social studies, mathematics, and science; Midlevel- In addition to standard requirements, geometry and algebra I or II; at least two courses in biology, chemistry, and physics; and at least one credit of a foreign language; Rigorous- In addition to midlevel requirements, an additional credit in mathematics including pre-calculus or higher; biology, chemistry, and physics; and at least three foreign language credits (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)
graduates…mostly found in multidisciplinary science studies (71 percent women) and psychology (70 percent women)” (Landivar, 2013, p. 19). According to the *Disparities in STEM Employment by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: American Community Survey Reports* (Landivar, 2013) the underrepresentation of women may be attributed to the notion that while more young women are entering into STEM fields than in previous decades, they tend to leave STEM employment as they age. This trend may be related to the fact that 62% of women in STEM employment do not have children at home whereas 57% of men in STEM employment do have children at home, demonstrating that women may not find STEM careers conducive to having children. Male engineering graduates employed full-time earn $85,000 per year compared to $58,800 for females, although females employed in STEM increase their earnings by approximately $16,300. For Hispanics, employment in STEM increases earnings about $18,300. Interestingly, although Hispanics comprise nearly 15% of the workforce, they make up only 7% of STEM jobs. Therefore, while STEM employment offers financial incentives for females and Hispanics, both continue to be underrepresented.

The problem is especially evident for young Latinas, more so in STEM fields. Matute-Bianchi (2008) suggests that the Mexican-descent students in her study looked to adults as role models of success. According to National Science Foundation (2013) only 2% of females in STEM fields are Latinas, which could hinder the number of potential STEM role models that may serve to introduce younger Latinas into STEM careers.

The problem of underachieving Latinas is multi-dimensional. Historically, the notion of educated women has been problematic (Martin, 1994). John Stuart Mill noted
the contradiction of the educated woman in 1861 when he stated, ‘Women who read, much more who write, are, in the existing constitution of things, a contradiction and a disturbing element (Martin, 1994, p. 101). Similarly, Finders (1997) and others suggest that the structures of the schooling environment limit the roles that students, especially underrepresented groups, have access to, making it difficult to achieve academic success as measured by the dominant group (Heath, 1983; MacLeod, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Willis, 1977). To be an educated Latina, then, poses a complex problem in a predominantly White, patriarchal society that socializes boys and girls differently, starting at birth, and readies them for our society’s higher valuation of men and masculine roles (Martin, 1994).

The crux of the problem, then, is that much of the existing literature on underrepresented minority youth has focused on explaining their underachievement, certainly an important topic. However, equally important is the notion that many minority girls do achieve academic success. The argument in the scholarly literature is that in order to achieve academically, minority females must work harder than their white counterparts, acquiesce to the demands and structures of schooling institutions and peers, and live a marginalized existence within the confines of their schools (Fordham, 1996; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990) or they must become proficient at negotiating their gendered, racial, and/or class identities in order to meet academic demands (Akom, 2008; Bettie, 2003; Fordham, 1993; Hartman, 2006; and Mendoza-Denton, 2008). The literature also attends to the possible costs minority students may face when they attain academic success (Zentella, 1997). Some of these costs include accusations of acting White and
betraying ethnic group, loss of important peer relationships, denied entrance into peer networks, and accusations of acting effeminate or nerdy (Carter, 2006; Fordham, 1996).

Not only do underrepresented minorities such as Latinas face possible costs associated with working towards academic achievement, but they also face lifelong consequences associated by not achieving academically. As previously stated, women and minorities as underrepresented in STEM careers (Landivar, 2013). Hispanics, or Latinos, comprise 66% of the U.S. workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). 29% of employed Latinos have less than a high school diploma, 31% are high school graduates with no college, 15% have some college with no degree, 8% have an Associate degree, and 18% have a Bachelor’s degree and higher. Hispanics continue to earn approximately $578 per week for full-time employment compared to $629 for Blacks, $802 for Whites, and $942 for Asians. Latina women earn an average of $541 per week compared to $606 for Black women, $722 for White women, and $819 for Asian women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Salary is directly related to educational attainment as evidenced by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics of 2013 in which Latinas with less than a high school diploma, on average, earn $508 per week of full-time employment, those with high school diplomas and no college earn approximately $708 per week, Latinas with some college or associate’s degree earn roughly $857 per week, and $1,371 per week for Latinas with a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Therefore, the more education Latinas attain, the better their pay. If Latinas’ schooling experiences are not conducive to achieving academic success compared to their White counterparts, the inequalities will persist.
The scholarly literature, however, is lacking with regard to the specific ways that middle school Latinas negotiate their social identities in order to meet academic demands, nor does it adequately address middle school Latinas’ perspectives on how they come to be academically successful or unsuccessful. It is not enough, however, to enact social identities without a system of recognition. According to Gee (2000), Burke and Stets (2009), and Jenkins (2008) identities are under constant negotiation and are heavily dependent on the context in which they are activated and recognized.

The literature on academic achievement of underrepresented minority men and women, as well as that of working-class men and women shows that the negotiation of identities is consequential to how students achieve in academic coursework, especially beginning in middle school and through college (Anderman, 2003). Understanding how adolescent Latinas achieve varying levels of academic success may serve to illuminate how schooling institutions can support minority students. Because identity is a complex construct, Gee’s (2000) four perspectives for “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’” (p. 99) are useful in explaining the intersection of the identities that define individuals in particular contexts and how agency plays a part in the negotiation of identities within that context, in this case, schooling. Jenkins (2008) is also helpful in the recognition of certain identities in contrast to others. For example, the differences in identity performances between Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas served to highlight how social identities are recognized.

In working to understand how Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas develop and negotiate their identities within their homes and school, I focused on analyzing what
the girls did and said from the identity perspectives introduced by Gee. How these actions were recognized, or not, by their parents, teachers, and peers was key to understanding the negotiation of their social identities and their respective saliency. Honors AVID Latinas are the focus of this chapter, while General AVID Latinas are the focus of Chapter Five.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this investigation, then, was to capture young Latinas’ understandings of their schooling experiences in order to explain the processes by which they became high- or low-achieving students, particularly in STEM related subjects such as 8th grade General Physical Science and Honors Science. In this way, this investigation contributes not only to the scholarly literature on differential student achievement but also to practitioners’ (i.e., teachers and administrators) understandings of Latinas’ behavior in school environments. Past studies that have attempted to explain differential achievement between girls and boys as well between White and minority students. Studies that have addressed the problem have yielded mixed conclusions which attribute differential achievement to a wide range of factors including: cultural and language mismatch theory (Heath, 1983), institutional structures such as tracking (Callahan, 2005; Conchas, 2001; Oakes, 1985, Valenzuela, 1999), constructs of race, class, and gender (Akom, 2008; Bettie, 2003; Carter, 2008; Conchas, 2006; Finders, 1997; Fordham, 1993; Hartman, 2006; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Matute-Bianchi, 2008; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; O’Connor, 2007; Zentella, 1997). These studies also point to an increasing
need to further our understanding of the phenomena of differential academic achievement within these groups.

**Research Questions**

This study was concerned with how 8th grade Latinas engaged in identity work/negotiation within the context of their schooling and what this tells us about differential achievement within this group.

The following questions served to focus my study:

1. How do Latinas in middle school negotiate their social identities?
2. In what ways do parents, teachers, and peers recognize middle school Latinas’ social identities?
3. What role does this recognition play in Latinas’ varying levels of academic achievement?

To address these questions, I conducted a qualitative case-study at a middle school in Riverside County, California, during the 2012-2013 school year. I selected six Latina 8th grade students, three of whom were enrolled in Honors Physical Science and three in General Physical Science. All six girls were enrolled in the untracking, college-prep program called AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination). I observed and interviewed the girls in their respective science and AVID classes and the common areas of the school. I also interviewed each participant’s mother and science and AVID teachers. Observations and interviews yielded data that provided insights into how the girls envisioned their future selves in terms of educational attainment and professions and
how the girls worked toward achieving their academic and personal goals. My methodology is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

In collecting my data via interviews and observations, I relied upon a theoretical framework based on social identity theory and identity perspectives (discussed further in Chapter 2). According to Gee (2000), the complex process of identity development relies heavily on the social interaction that takes place in varying contexts and how the individual negotiates these identities as performances within contexts. This negotiation serves to recognize an individual as a particular type of person or as part of who that person is. I argue that this negotiation was an important part of how 8th grade Latinas produced varying degrees of academic achievement.

**Main Findings**

I found that Honors AVID Latinas and General AVID Latinas achieved differently due to enacted behaviors and recognition of those behaviors. Honors AVID Latinas intentionally negotiated academic behaviors associated with recognition as serious students. For Honors AVID Latinas, serious student meant being present and future goal-oriented. How parents, teachers, and peers recognized Honors AVID Latinas as serious students hinged on the work involved in maintaining this social identity. General AVID Latinas enacted behaviors associated with recognition as good students and good girls. For these girls, their interpretations of good student influenced their performances. This meant doing well in school, being well behaved, and being future oriented. Their parents, however, privileged social behavior over academics and, therefore, recognized their daughters’ enactments of good student as good girl
performances. Both groups of students performed different academic identities that served to meet their present academic goals.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The differential achievement between White students and underrepresented minority students is not a matter easily explained by attending to just one factor such as socioeconomic status or race. Research suggests that racial, ethnic, class, and gender identity constructs influence students’ schooling experiences and academic achievement (Ayala, 2006; Akom, 2008; Bettie, 2003; Carter, 2006; Cohen, 1993; Connell, 1993; Finders, 1997; Fine, 1993; Fordham, 1993; Gallegos-Castillo, 2006; Hartman, 2006; Heath, 1983; Lopez, 2006; Matute-Bianchi, 2008; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; O’Connor, 2001; Romo, L.F., Kouyoumdjian, C., Nadeem, E., Sigman, M., 2006; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993; Weis, 1993; and Zentella, 1997). The implications of differential academic achievement reach far beyond the confines of K-12 schooling, impacting college graduation rates, fields of study and degree completion, and employment and pay opportunities (Landivar, 2013).

Past studies have attempted to explain the academic underachievement of underrepresented minority youth. Studies that have addressed the problem have yielded mixed conclusions which attribute underachievement to a wide range of factors including: cultural and language mismatch (Heath, 1983; Valdés, 1996), institutional structures such as tracking (Callahan, 2005; Conchas, 2001; Oakes, 1985, Valenzuela, 1999), and constructs of race, class, and gender (Akom, 2008; Bettie, 2003; Carter, 2006; Conchas, 2006; Finders, 1997; Fordham, 1993; Hartman, 2006; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; O’Connor, 2007; Zentella, 1997). The following review of related literature further explains these attempts. The remainder of this chapter
reviews various key theories that have attempted to explain how such factors affect differential achievement of underrepresented youth.

Identity- Race, Class, and Gender

The social constructs of race, class, and gender have been cited as contributing to differential achievement of underrepresented minority youth (Ayala, Akom, 2008; Bettie, 2003; Carter, 2006; Carter, 2008; Finders, 1997; Fordham, 1993; Hartman, 2006; Lopez, Mendoza-Denton, 2008; O’Connor, 2001; Payne, 2008; Weis, 1985; Zentella, 1997). However, the various intersectionalities of race, class, and gender are not experienced in isolation, but are experienced simultaneously in various social locations or contexts. In these contexts, individuals makes sense of their social identities in relation to their positions in the social order, being middle- or working-class, Black, Hispanic, White, or Asian, male or female. Individuals then experience their social identities in response to how others interpret and respond to those individuals (O’Connor, 2001).

Bettie’s (2003) comparative study is indicative of the complexities of identity and social class, both of which affect how female adolescents of varying ethnicities react to institutional forces and views of academic achievement. Bettie refers to the everyday negotiation of class-based experiences between working-class girls and middle-class girls as “unspoken boundary work” (p. 7). For example, Bettie discovered that the high school girls of Waretown High performed a class-based identity that was influenced by “gender, sexuality, race, whiteness or color” (p. 192). She found that recognition as middle-class girls was easier for White working-class female students than for their Mexican-American counterparts due to the fact that the girls had to content with the minority label
that, in the United States, tends to be synonymous with working-class (p. 160).

Therefore, White working-class girls performing a middle-class identity had little trouble being recognized as such. This recognition afforded them access to the same resources that were available to their middle-class counterparts such as access to college-prep classes. On the other hand, working-class Mexican American girls had to work hard to “pass” as being something they were not by enacting specific social class behaviors that would be recognized as middle-class so that they could be afforded access to institutional opportunities that they otherwise may not have accessed. Therefore, Mexican-American girls performed as members of a social class that they did not belong to and their class performances at school differed from the social class at home. Working-class White and Mexican American girls engaged in a careful negotiation between middle-class, college-prep identity and working-class, vocational track identity. Furthermore, White female students did not experience separation from family, community, and friends, as did the Mexican American students.

Bettie (2003) suggests that Mexican-American girls might be pressured to sacrifice their racial/ethnic identity by subscribing to a pro-academic identity. Mexican-American girls would not be vulnerable to vocational track placement if they were extraordinarily “good” academically, performed the school-sanctioned ideal of femininity (that is synonymous with being White and middle-class), and made no mistakes along the way (p. 162).

Recognition of gendered performances played a crucial role in Mendoza-Denton’s (2008) study of Latina youth gangs in a Northern California high school. Mendoza-
Denton delves into the lives of the Norteña and Sureña girl gang members. Her ethnography vividly describes how these girls use language (Spanish, English, and body language), styles of dress, and make-up as sources of power within and across social networks. Gender was an identity that was performed through language, dress, and actions. The cholas in this study performed a specific gendered discourse that protected them from social injury mainly dealing with abusive relationships. The “muy macha” discourse allowed cholas to embody and modify the “machismo” attitude usually reserved for men. They were able to speak their minds to whomever, wherever, commanding respect (p. 161-171). The girls openly challenged societal norms regarding how femininity is done. They willingly and gladly deviated from the mainstream feminine way of dress and body image, favoring looking “hard” and avoiding diets (p. 155-158).

During the early adolescent years, students tend to experience a heightened sense of self-consciousness and vulnerability to social comparisons. Not only do students have to negotiate entrance into the “right” peer group but they also have to contend with the increased emphasis on academic achievement. Anderman (2003) examines students’ sense of belonging in middle school and contends “a sense of alienation from schooling as an institution may increase in the middle school and early high school years” (p. 6).

In her book, Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High, Finders (1997) uncovers the complexities of negotiating peer groups and good girl identities though the lens of literacy practices. Her study included 6th grade girls whom she referred to as the “social queens” and the “tough cookies.” The social queens were a group of popular girls
whose parents encouraged and valued academic achievement. The social queens, however, often hid their interest in reading specific genres and hid caring about their learning. They prioritized peer and romantic relationships and deemed academic behavior as immature and as a quest for acceptance by adults. Instead, the social queens focused on ways to avoid sanctioned literacy instruction, primarily by participating in their own literacy events. The social queens instituted a practiced called “kissing up” to teachers in order to get positive attention, and protect their reputation with friends (p. 77). This practice was also carefully used to cover up any actual participation in literacy learning. More importantly, however, kissing up helped these girls appease parents, which served to avoid discipline at home and helped them stay within the boundaries of good girls.

The tough cookies, on the other hand, often came from homes where parents supported education, but only as a means of bettering the family. The girls in this group focused on learning. They formed positive relationships with teachers by participating in class, completing homework, and being well-behaved. At home, the tough cookies had tight bonds with their families, but primarily with their mothers. Values such as hard work, self-reliance, and putting family first were instilled in these girls. They were also encouraged to steer away from peer influences. The tough cookies viewed “kissing up” as a fraudulent practice negating the path to independence though hard work. For the tough cookies, literacy practices not tied to academics centered on economic prospects and community (hosting parties to sell items for decorating homes) and self-expression (writing poetry and journaling). These practices worked to prepare the girls for their
gendered roles having to do with home and family identity. The tough cookies good girls that were to grow up to be strong, independent women who took care of their families at all costs.

For both groups of girls, events such as note-passing and signing yearbooks were part of the “literate underlife” of the school that played a significant role in the formation and maintenance of peer groups as well as in academic engagement (p. 24). Note-passing, specifically, was a gendered activity used to organize peer groups and maintain peer group control. Signing yearbooks became an activity reserved for those who could afford the books and those who were involved in important social events and extra-curricular activities that could be photographed for the yearbook. Through literacy practices, girls “document allegiances, claim status, and challenge authority” (p. 24). In doing so, they also authored their identities as middle school girls.

Similarly, other research suggests that working-class girls must enact the “good girl” identity in order to succeed academically (Fordham, 1994; Hartman, 2006). Hartman’s study of 19 white, working-class female high school students focuses on the intersection of gender and class in relation to literacy and overall academic achievement. Like Bettie (2003), the silence of the girls in Hartman’s study was often mistaken for characteristics of a well-behaved young lady or good student as opposed to disengagement, resistance, or fear. Teacher observations noted the working-class girls as serious about their education and conscientious (p. 94). Hartman found that silence was a desirable trait for female students on behalf of the school staff and, often, the family. Bettie (2003) would argue that teachers would perceive female minority students who
fulfill their roles as female minority students (quiet, acquiescing) as a display of normal behavior and therefore not noticed as signs of resistance, thereby perpetuating their underachievement.

Gender relations for women in college also prove to be an especially salient aspect of their schooling experiences. The ways in which women navigate their peer networks and relations are consequential to the amount of academic effort toward coursework and to their imagined career trajectories (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990). The historical constraints at work, including the expectation to conform to the social norm of becoming involved in a romantic relationship played a part in identity negotiation as “normal”. For example, women that enter college with high aspirations of career goals they could attain by working hard in the given academic settings may leave college with reimagined ambitions of less-prestigious careers. Seventy percent of the women in Holland and Eisenhart’s (1990) study, for example, began college with diverse interests and career goals and then abandoned those career goals for marriage and for spouse’s goals, indicating that women who manage to evade the culture of romance do well in college and go on to sustainable, professional careers. The change in aspirations was primarily caused by the pressure to abide by the social norms that were primarily based in making oneself look attractive and seeking a romantic relationship with a male partner.

In a mixed-method study of 68 native-born African American and Latino 13-20 year-old males and females in New York, Carter (2006) revealed that the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identities influenced the extent to which students of color embraced behaviors such as taking on a pro-academic identity. For Black and
Latino/a students, White talk (Standard English) was synonymous with “girl talk”, an inherently female behavior (p. 118). Use of White talk signified a betrayal to Black and Latino’s racial identity and subjected them to being labeled gender deviant. Black and Latina girls who spoke Standard English were accused of acting White, which signified betrayal of their racial identity as well.

The findings from Carter’s study complicate the notion that academic success is simply a case of girls do better than boys or visa-versa. For example, the costs associated with conceding to the demands of the institution in speaking Standard English (the preferred form of communication in a classroom setting) are high and have direct implications on academic achievement. Female and male minority students run the risk of losing a position within their peer networks that could have otherwise been useful in supporting an academic identity. The boys in Carter’s study had an image of masculinity they had to live up to for fear that they would be considered “soft”. The behaviors that accompanied such an image were not consistent with the expectations of a school environment. Behaviors such as cutting class, fighting, speaking street talk, or challenging the rules were conducive to academic success as viewed by the school system. Therefore, the Black and Latino males in the study deemed sitting still, paying attention, completing homework, and using Standard English feminine behaviors. In these cases, identity negotiation and recognition was consequential to how students navigated their schooling experiences and achieved varying levels of academic success.
Achievement

Studies of in-group variation with regard to academic achievement have revealed that students that have a greater sense of their ethnic identity out-performed those that did not. For example, African American high school girls who had greater awareness of their African American identity developed co-narratives that lead to resilience were more apt to succeed academically (Akom, 2008; Fordham, 1997; O’Connor, 1997; Robinson & Biran, 2006). Specifically, O’Connor’s (1997) study finds that high race-, class-, and gender-consciousness and not “thinking White”, along with sustained contact with Black role models of upward mobility and the feeling of personal competence that came with achieving academically, made African American high school females resilient (p. 614).

Similarly, Matute-Bianchi (2008) study addressing generational differences among students of Mexican descent provided a possible explanation for in-group variation among Latinos. In her study of high school students, she found that caste-like, newly arrived minorities tended to have a positive dual-frame of reference that was beneficial to focusing on school achievement and not on the societal forces that work against them. Their belief in meritocracy and the “it’s better here than there” dual-frame of reference helped them work toward their academic and career goals without feeling oppressed by the dominant group. Immigrant minorities tended to view education as the means by which to overcome the temporary setbacks that come with being in a host country. On the other hand, involuntary minorities, those brought into their current country via slavery, conquest, or colonization tended to have a negative dual frame of reference with regard to status mobility (p. 9); “they compare their status with that of the
dominant group and conclude that they are worse off than they ought to be for no other reason than they belong to a subordinate and disparaged minority group” (p.14).

Another example of differential achievement among Latinos comes from Lopez’s (2006) study on Dominican-descent women in a New York high school. These women outperformed their male counterparts primarily because the women resisted their own marginalization by voicing their social critiques of substandard schooling, participating in opportunities to discuss race, capitalism, and patriarchy, and in looking to their strong Dominican mothers as role models. The high school girls in this study demanded an education, requested enrollment in certain classes, participated in extracurricular activities and student organizations, and took pride in their academic achievement and worked to meet current and future academic goals that would help them in becoming “strong, independent” women (p. 93). Their feelings of self-efficacy proved useful in advocating for their education.

On the other hand, studies have also show that girls may tend to be underconfident in their abilities in certain subjects. In one study, girls underestimate their abilities in mathematics as compared to boys regardless of their actual skills, perceiving themselves as less smart than boys in the subject of math (Lloyd, Walsh, & Yailagh, 2005, p. 385). However, when it came to actual achievement in math, girls score as well, if not better, than their male counterparts. The findings of this study also underscore the relevance of feelings of self-efficacy in relation to academic achievement.

Girls’ perceptions of ability may also be greatly influenced by prominent social stereotypes. Because school is a microcosm of the larger society (Bidwell, 1965) within it
exist structures that reflect inequities such as stereotypes that may complicate the recognition of identities. While studies reveal no statistical gender differences in mathematics achievement scores for boys and girls ages 9-13, they do reveal gendered differences in attitude towards math (Hargreaves, Homer, & Swinnerton, 2008). Boys thought of themselves as better at math even though they perform no better than girls. Girls thought of themselves as better at English even though they performed as well in math as their male counterparts. Studies reveal that counter-stereotypic images did not induce stereotype threat, therefore the girls in the study scored significantly higher in comprehension of the science lesson than when shown stereotypic images. However, male students scored higher when shown stereotypic images than the counter-stereotypic images (Good, Woodzicka, & Wingfield, 2010). Like Lloyd, Walsh, and Yailagh (2005), Good et al found that when girls compare themselves with boys, they tend to believe themselves academically inferior. However, when reminded that they can be as successful as boys, as in the images of a female scientist (counter-stereotypic), the perceptions of their ability positively influenced their actual achievement. Counter-stereotypic images led girls to score much higher in comprehension of a science lesson than when the girls were shown stereotypic images. This study revealed the negative impact that stereotypes can have on the academic achievement of young women engaged in academic subjects that have been, traditionally, considered male.

Historically, academic subjects stereotyped as male subjects tend to become less appealing to girls whereas stereotyped female subjects become less appealing to boys (Watt, 2004). Claude Steele’s (2011) theory of stereotype threat introduced stereotypes’
potential impact on identity including perceived ability, performance, relationships, and aspirations. In Steele’s study, adult women who were reminded of the stigma surrounding female math performance prior to taking a difficult math test performed at a lower level than equally skilled adult men. However, women who were told the test showed no gender difference performed at the same level as equally skilled men. Steele argued that stereotype threat inhibits women from persisting in math-related fields. For minority men, especially Black males, the stereotype threat that black males were good at sports and not good at academics could either deter them from putting forth effort in school or propel them to work exceedingly hard to dispel the academic stereotype. However, it was often the case that Black males who persisted in difficult academic courses would still fall short of performing as well as their White or Asian counterparts because they studied in isolation, without the help of peers or instructors. Furthermore, Steele contended that individuals often saw themselves in terms of the identity that was most under attack in a given milieu. An individual that cares about how he or she is perceived and lacks the strength or skills to contradict the stereotypes associated with his or her identity will often choose to hide the attacked identity. In some cases, people may choose to hide their racial, ethnic, or class identities and “pass” with a different identity.

Adolescent girls will often choose coursework that varies from the courses chosen by boys. In her longitudinal study of 1,323 seventh through twelfth grade participants in Australia, Watt (2004) discovered that girls’ expectancies for success in math declined through junior high school (grades 7 and 8) and increased toward the end of high school, but not to the point where they were before they began to decline in grades 7-8 (p. 1566-
Moreover, girls perceived math as more difficult than did boys in grades 8-10 and increasingly difficult through grades 7-9. By contrast, boys’ perceptions of math remained stable across grades 7-10. Intrinsic value for math was higher for boys than girls. Watt found that during the middle school years, adolescents’ perceptions of ability in math and language arts decline. Overall, gender differences favored boys in math and girls in English (p. 1569). This study suggests that female students’ awareness of academic ability is affected negatively during the middle school years in part due to the change in school structures from elementary to middle school and partially due to several factors related to being female, including starting school with gender beliefs in place due to “socialization experiences in the home and wider society, such as portrayals of men and women in the media and… sex-typed messages” similarly affecting boys’ and girls’ perceptions and values (p. 1571).

Studies have noted that perceptions of ability vary according to gender and have academic implications for both female and male students. Hargreaves, Homer, and Swinnerton (2008) investigated gender differences on mathematics achievement tests in England for gifted and talented boys and girls ages 9-13. While the quantitative results of their study revealed no statistical gender differences in mathematics achievement scores, the authors did find gendered differences in attitude towards math. Boys thought of themselves as better at math even though they performed no better than girls. Girls thought of themselves as better at English even though they performed as well in math as their male counterparts.
Studies that suggest that teacher perceptions of male and female students affect their interactions with students as well as how students respond to academic tasks and activities (Tournaki, 2003; Van Duzer, 2006; Tiedemann, 2002; Jones and Myhill, 2004) reveal that when asked to predict student academic and social success, teachers used both relevant and irrelevant information about students. Relevant information included considering characteristics such as attentiveness in academic lessons and cooperation in social interactions. Irrelevant information included considering characteristics such as being uncooperative without taking into account actual academic difficulty. Teachers who used irrelevant information tended to predict less social success for boys who read below grade level (p. 318). Van Duzer (2006) also studied teacher perceptions and found that pre-credentialed teachers brought gender-biased expectations to their credential program. These expectations “disadvantaged boys in terms of academic failure” (p. 97). Yet another study of 288 elementary students and 48 of their teachers found that teachers who believed in the gender role stereotypes also believed that boys were better at math than girls more so than teachers who did not subscribe to the stereotypes (Tiedemann, 2002). Lastly, Jones and Myhill’s (2004) study of high-achieving and under-achieving boys and girls in rural and urban schools in the United Kingdom found that teacher perceptions of “troublesome boys” and “compliant girls” work to “reinforce[e] the conceptualization of underachievement as an issue about boys. The high-achieving girl and the underachieving boy are both viewed as typical of their gender and described as conforming to gender norms” (p. 558). However, by the time students reach middle school, prominent gender stereotypes influence students’ perceptions of what it means to
be a smart girl or a smart boy and, furthermore, what it means to be a smart minority male or female student.

**Cultural and linguistic mismatch.** Researchers have cited cultural and linguistic mismatch, subtractive schooling, and untracking as possible explanations for why Latino students are not on par with their White counterparts. These arguments have certainly served to further the discussion surrounding differential achievement. A cultural and linguistic mismatch occurs when students’ culture, language, values do not match that of the dominant group (Heath, 1983), represented in the context of school by the teacher, staff, administrators, or other students. Working-class children, especially minority children, can be at a serious academic disadvantage when there is a mismatch between the language patterns and cultural practices taught and used at home and those that students are expected to use in the context of school. Students and their working-class families may have vastly differently understandings of the schooling institutions’ expectations for achievement and in many cases where cultural and linguistic mismatches occur, working-class definitions of achievement may not have much to do with academic success. For example, achievement may mean doing well in school, attending college, and securing a career. For others, achievement may mean remaining a part of the communities that they came from and becoming a contributing member.

**Subtractive schooling.** The subtractive schooling framework posits that schools work toward subtracting from the students’ culture and primary language in order to supplant them with the dominant cultures’ views and language (Valenzuela, 1999). Subtractive practices such as ineffective counseling, lack of Advanced Placement courses
for Limited English Proficient students, and tracking work to segregate minority students from White students and may disconnect students from potential caring and supportive relationships with peers and teachers that may have otherwise served to help students access necessary resources. In doing so, schools may also fail to support biculturalism and bilingualism which are important in the appropriation of necessary social capital that allow students to negotiate schooling experiences that support academic achievement.

Allocation of parental time in activities that enhance learning and schools’ investments in resources has been shown to increase academic achievement for all students including Blacks and Hispanics (Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine, 1996). A study by of minority elementary school aged children concluded that the increase in academic achievement was attributed to two factors; Parents who invested time in activities such as reading with their children, playing educational games, and helping with homework played an important role in promoting academic achievement in their children by increasing the children’s social capital. Conversely, students from single-family homes or who had working mothers were said to have a decrease in social capital. However, a school’s investment in resources such as hiring highly qualified teachers, increasing per pupil expenditures, and smaller class sizes was highly related to increased student achievement. Investment in these resources served to fill the gap in social capital that students needed for increased opportunities at academic achievement. Historically underserved students benefitted greatly from these resources.

Often, students have to resort to their own resources in an effort to tackle mismatches and the effects of subtractive schooling practices. The girls in Zentella’s
(1997) study, for example, had to negotiate their identities between the contexts of school and home, employing “survival tactics” where they chose non-standard English over Spanish and standard-English to make life in the streets of *el bloque* manageable. However, non-Standard English was not suited to meet the academic demands of the schooling institution, creating a linguistic mismatch. The struggle for being truly bilingual gave in to the demands of the mainstream society.

The careful negotiation between academic, language, and gendered identities brought to the forefront in Zentella’s (1997) study of Puerto Rican families in East Harlem, New York. In the Puerto Rican neighborhood called *el bloque*, Zentella studied with over 20 families and 37 children, but focused on 5 elementary school girls, Zentella found that children who lacked minimal fluency in Spanish had a hard time participating in the social practices of *el bloque*, which could render them lacking the integral support needed to gain and maintain membership in peer groups. Children who lacked English fluency had a better chance of acquiring the necessary conversational English through friendships with bilingual children and adults. Since most children employed a practice called code-switching (the practice of switching back and forth between two languages or dialects), picking up key words or phrases in the context of play could be done with little effort.

Zentella carefully explores how these children and their families enact bilingualism in an effort to explain why many bilingual Puerto Ricans drop out of school and have difficulty finding employment. What she finds is that even though being bilingual is a complex, hard-to-negotiate skill, it is either revered or frowned upon by the outsiders.
This extreme dichotomy makes it difficult for Puerto Ricans in *el bloque* to maintain relationships with their peers. Children in *el bloque* were socialized into culturally defined gender roles in which girls spent more time at home and with other girls, speaking mostly Spanish and boys spent most of their time outside, playing with other boys outside of *el bloque* and immersed in English-only networks. Within the third generation of New York Puerto Ricans, bilingualism was often not a desirable characteristic. The choice of which language to use and how further complicated identity via their interactions with the people of *el bloque* and school. Zentella noted their struggle, “English fluency, even monolingualism, is not the guaranteed passport to educational and economic progress that organizations like US English claim” (p. 263).

Eventually, language shift towards English seemed to be the solution, while holding on to the belief that the older generations would have some native language influence over the younger generations. In this case, the neighborhood and the school served to subtract bilingualism, an important connection to racial identity much like Valenzuela’s subtractive schooling.

Parents with the necessary social capital have an advantage when it comes to supporting their children as students (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). Middle class parents can access and use resources necessary to help their resolve educational problems that their children may encounter as well as advocate for services and privileges they deem necessary for their children. Working-class parents were not quite as fortunate. Working class parents respond to their children’s educational and behavioral issues at school individually or are forced to draw from resources offered
to a network they may have access to, middle-class parents respond collectively, are heard, and respected and get results that mediate their students’ higher achievement more easily and more frequently than students of working-class parents.

Tracking is perhaps the most common form of subtractive schooling. Minority students who are tracked by ability and attend secondary schools with high populations of minority students receive less intensive and less demanding courses, especially in mathematics and science than their White counterparts. They have less access to rigorous curriculum, high quality instruction, and mathematics and science resources—the knowledge necessary to pursue careers in science or mathematics (Oakes, et al. 1990). Furthermore, students that are tracked into courses aimed at developing English proficiency through modified instruction are also typically exposed to coursework that is less challenging than mainstream classes and that fails to provide students with access to academic content (Callahan, 2005). Instead, students who lack English proficiency are placed in low track classrooms that inherently limit their exposure to quality instruction that would otherwise further their language development and understanding of content. Callahan asserts that the rigorous curriculum afforded to fluent English speaking students can be presented to limited English proficient students by way of modified instruction that supports language development while exposing students to core curriculum. Students who are tracked in low track classrooms rarely make it into college preparation courses and therefore miss an opportunity to appropriate the vital social and cultural capital that is needed to pursue a path to college. In fact, many if not most of these students do not graduate from high school and those that do are bound to attend
community college where they will be directed towards blue-collar employment (Mehan et al, 1994). In cases where students have learned or have been supported in circumventing subtractive schooling structures, students manage to learn the same skills that upwardly mobile, Black college-bound students learn while maintaining their racial/ethnic identities (Bettie, 2003; Mehan, H., Hubbard, L., Villanueva, I., 1996; O’Connor, 1997). These skills then become integral in how these students negotiate their identifies in the context of their schools and serve as means of accommodation without assimilation.

Conclusions

Studies that have addressed the problem of differential academic achievement have produced mixed conclusions which attribute underachievement to social constructs of race, class, and gender, generational differences, and school structures such as tracking. Regardless of the conclusions, it is clear that identity rests at the center of the theories related to differential achievement among underrepresented minority youth and identity of various kinds play a key role in understanding differential achievement among girls – specifically, identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, and social class (Akom, 2008; Bettie, 2003; Carter, 2006; Finders, 1997; Fordham, 1993; Hartman, 2006; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; O’Connor, 1997; and Zentella, 1997).

Theoretical Framework

Because identity is a complex construct, Gee’s (2000) identity perspectives for “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’” (p. 99) are useful in explaining the intersection of the identities that define individuals in particular contexts and how agency
plays a part in the negotiation of identities within that context. According to Gee, identity development relies heavily on the social interaction that takes place in varying contexts and how the individual negotiates these identities as performances within contexts in order to be recognized as a particular kind of person.

The perspectives for studying identity introduced by Gee (2000) define the four perspectives through which to analyze identity (identity as a “kind of person” and dependent on interactions with others) as: Nature identity (N-identity) which is biological in nature; Institutional identity (I-identity) where one is recognized as a certain “type” of person within the workplace or school; Discursive identity (D-identity) which is based on language/communication; and Affinity identity (A-identity) which is based on preferences.

**Nature Identity**

N-identity, according to Gee (2000) is a state of being in which the individual has no control over its development or recognition, often biological in nature. For example, male or female are N-identities because people do not have control over the gender with which they are born, just as a person born with a psychological disorder or genetic disease has no control over either. However, while N-identity may seem fixed with regard to biological and genetic identity, how people recognize a person’s N-identity depends on the surrounding discourse, affinity groups, and even the power of institutions that shape how we see our own and one another’s gender, race/ethnicity, and even mental illnesses/disorders or diseases. Society recognizes N-identities through various lenses (institutions, discourse, and affinity groups) and that can complicate their recognition.
Maintenance and recognition of N-identities, therefore, require various levels of interactions within and across contexts. For example, “Mexican” may be viewed and analyzed as an N-identity if recognized as blood line, I-identity if recognized by an institution’s label, D-identity as recognized by discourse of those who speak of someone in terms of their “Mexicanness”, or A-identity if a person is recognized as Mexican by the affiliations and/or practices in which he or she engages. Therefore, as with all identity-types, recognition is key.

**Institutional Identity**

Institutions such as school and workplaces assign individuals their I-identities typically based on the individual’s position in society (such as social class) or position within a given institution. Regarding I-identities, Gee (2000) asserts, that when they are “…underwritten and sustained by an institution, that institution works, across time and space, to see to it that certain sorts of discourse, dialogue and interactions happen often enough and in similar enough ways to sustain the I-identities it underwrites” (p.105). Teachers, parents, and peers recognize I-identities at school and facilitate the maintenance of those identities through school-sanctioned activities and pressure to maintain a particular identity. For example, Gee refers to I-identities as callings or impositions in which a professor may see his ascribed I-identity, professor, as a calling while a prisoner may see his ascribed I-identity, inmate, as an imposition. I-identities can be viewed and analyzed in terms of the institutions’ expectations for fulfilling such positions and individuals’ willingness to accept or contest ascribed identities.
Discourse Identity

A D-identity is co-created by the discourse surrounding the individual. How others talk to and about an individual serves to produce, reproduce, and maintain a D-identity, which also makes it so that an individual can have several D-identities. A D-identity may also be earned or achieved. For example, recognition of a certain individual character trait (hard-working, compassionate, judgmental) can comprise a D-identity. D-identities also often serve to maintain other social identities and contest others (N-, I-, or A-).

Affinity Identity

A-identities are created within shared experiences within or outside of institutionally sanctioned activities. Those who establish allegiance to a cause or endeavor, or share a preference for an idea, object, or belief may share A-identities. Those who share A-identities maintain their affiliation by acknowledging that there are others that do not share the same A-identity. This practice reaffirms their affinity identities.

The perspectives for viewing identity as proposed by Gee (2000) are not static, but rather fluctuate in prominence as agents make their ways through their daily-lived experiences. Therefore, these identity perspectives are rooted in social identity theory, which suggests that all identities are social in nature. Social identity theorist, Richard Jenkins (2008) states,

Identifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication, and negotiation” (pp. 17).
The complex process of identity development for all individuals relies heavily on the social interactions in which individuals’ loosely coupled identities fluctuate in saliency depending on the context in which they are recognized. Interactions are framed within contexts of similarity and difference among and between groups of people. Jenkins argues that individual identity (identity that emphasizes difference) and collective identity (identity that emphasizes similarities) are “entangled” and can only be recognized in social interaction (p. 38). Jenkins adds, “[T]he human world is the field upon which the individual and collective meet and meld” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 41). This performance and recognition relationship between and among groups of individuals serves to highlight the recognition of social identities. Therefore, I content that because school-aged children spend much of their time in the context of school and identity is interactionist by nature, the schooling institution is among the most important contexts within which identity, both individual and collective, becomes consequential.

For this study, I applied identity perspectives as defined by Gee (2000) and Jenkins’ (2008) lens for the relationship between performance and recognition between and among groups to analyze interactions within given contexts as a method to investigate the in-group variations in academic achievement of middle school Latinas. By doing so, I will better understand how middle school Latinas accept, contest, and negotiate their identities in interactions with peers, teachers, and parents. Finally, the ways in which the recognized identities affect academic achievement is crucial to further understanding differential academic achievement among Latinas.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Because identity is a complex social construct, my qualitative study was designed to document how Latinas’ describe their schooling experiences in order to better understand and explain the processes through which they come to achieve varying degrees of academic achievement. In particular, this study documented 8th grade Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas’ talk and actions at school as they related to academics.

Research Questions

This study was concerned with how 8th grade Latinas engaged in identity work/negotiation within the context of their schooling and what this tells us about differential achievement within this group.

The following questions served to focus my study:

1. How do Latinas in middle school negotiate their social identities?
2. In what ways do parents, teachers, and peers recognize middle school Latinas’ social identities?
3. How does this recognition affect the Latinas’ varying levels of academic achievement?

Research Design

A qualitative approach was best suited for this case study because the perspectives of the participants, documented as recorded and transcribed interviews, provided insight into how these girls made sense of their successes and failures in school. Given the inherently social nature of the school institution, a case study at a middle school provided
an opportunity to uncover the ways in which girls navigated their social identities and experiences within school to produce varying levels of academic achievement. “With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). Therefore, a qualitative approach allowed me to uncover how Latina middle school students’ negotiation of social identities was related to their academic success. Moreover, qualitative studies are suitable for investigating the meanings people construct about their lived experiences which yield data that are beneficial in explaining processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) such as the progression from the intersection of social identities to academic achievement.

**Population**

I conducted my research over the course of six months at Eagle Mountain Middle School (pseudonym). I chose this site because differing social classes are represented, from rural farming families (working-class) to professionals (middle-class). Existing literature demonstrates that social class is consequential to academic achievement (Bettie, 2003; Mehan et al, 1996; Oaks, 1985; Valenzuela, 2000; Weis 1993; Willis, 1997; The school was located in a city with a population of approximately 78,600 residents. The school was also multiethnic, which was important to this study because the scholarly literature proposes theories related to race and ethnicity and cultural and linguistic mismatch as possible explanations for differential achievement between White and minority students. The school served sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. Of the nearly 1,100 students enrolled in the 2011-2012 school year, 29% were White, 53% were
Hispanic or Latino, 10% were African American, and 2% were Asian. 1% of the school’s student population was Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 2% was Filipino, and 1% was American Indian. 2% of the students were of two or more races. 81% of the students were classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged (up from 53.5% in 2008) and 13% were English Language Learners (up from 11% in 2008). In the 2011-2012 school year, 31% of students’ parents were not high school graduates, 38% were high school graduates, 23% had some college education, 6% were college graduates, and 2% attended graduate school.

The participants in this qualitative study consisted of six female 8th grades students whom I labeled as Honors AVID Latinas because the girls were in honors, advanced level courses and AVID an class, and General AVID Latinas because they were in general education courses and an AVID class. Three Latinas were enrolled in Honors Physical Science and three in General Physical Science. Each student took part in two formal individual interviews and two formal group interviews. In addition, every girl’s mother participated in one formal individual interview. When it came time to interview parent participants, only mothers made themselves available, primarily because they were the ones who had signed the initial consent forms for their daughters’ participation and partly because they were available to speak to me during the day, before dinner needed preparing and their husbands came home from work.

I chose 8th grade science because it is an academically rigorous course that is dependent on achievement in math. Students who have been tracked into 8th grade Pre-algebra or Algebra 1 are enrolled in general Physical Science while those who were
tracked into 8th grade Geometry are enrolled in Honors AVID Physical Science. Formal tracking of students in this district begins as early as 6th grade. As some studies have shown (Lloyd, Walsh, and Yailagh, 2005; Watt, 2004), girls in the middle school grades seem to underestimate their academic abilities regardless of their actual skills, perceiving themselves as less smart than boys in the subject of math and girls’ expectancies for success in math decline through middle school. While I did not investigate math achievement specifically, science achievement is typically closely related to math achievement, especially in 8th grade Physical Science. Therefore, students in Honors Physical Science tended to be the students that had done well in math and were enrolled in Geometry, while those in general Physical Science were typically enrolled in Algebra Readiness or Algebra I. The girls in this study had taken Earth Science in 6th grade and Life Science in 7th grade. Of the three science courses in middle school, Physical Science is the most dependent on math than any other. The distinction between Honors and general Physical Science tracks was useful in comparing two groups of students in this study, Honors AVID Latinas and General AVID Latinas because the girls had already proven to have reached different levels of academic achievement that earned them their places within these tracks.

Student Participants. The Honors AVID Latinas in this study were Barbara, Denise, and Ericka (all pseudonyms). Barbara was a girl of Mexican descent. She was a thin girl, about 5’3” tall, with a fair complexion, and brown eyes that were slightly magnified by thin-framed dark brown glasses. She had long, wavy brown hair that she typically wore down or in a ponytail. She usually wore jeans, t-shirts, and sweatshirts
and did not wear make-up. Toward the end of the school year, Barbara was voted Most Likely to Succeed out of all of her 8th grade, female peers. Barbara’s mother speaks Spanish and very little English, although her father speaks a bit more English due to the business interactions at his place of employment. Both Barbara and her 15-year-old sister were bilingual. Barbara had been placed in honors level courses all three years of middle school because she had scored near or at Advanced on the California Standardized Tests in English Language Arts, Math, and Science and maintained a grade point average of 3.0 or above in all courses. She had chosen to sit at the front, left side of the class, facing the teacher, in both science and AVID classes.

Denise was also a girl of Mexican descent. She was about 5’4” tall, fair skinned, with long brown hair that she parted to the side and occasionally curled at the ends. Denise had braces, wore light make-up such as mascara and lip-gloss. Her light brown eyes were framed thin glasses. Denise’s mother and father were bilingual as was Denise and her 16-year-old sister, although Denise did not consider herself fluent in Spanish. Denise was also placed in honors level courses all three years of middle school because she had scored Advanced on the California Standardized Tests in English Language Arts, Math, and Science and maintained a grade point average of 3.0 or above in all courses. In science class, Denise had chosen to sit next to her best friend in the back left side of the class. In AVID class she sat next to another classmate.

Ericka, also of Mexican and Salvadorian descent, was about 5’3” tall, with dark tan skin, and long black hair that she parted down the middle and wore loose. Ericka typically dressed in t-shirts, sweatshirts, and faded jeans. She did not wear make-up of
any type. Ericka was an only child. She and her Spanish-speaking mother rented a single room from a family they had lived with for over seven years. In fact, they had never lived alone. Ericka was bilingual. Like Barbara and Denise, Ericka had been placed in honors level courses all three years of middle school because she had scored Advanced on the California Standardized Tests in English Language Arts, Math, and Science and maintained a grade point average of 3.0 or above in all courses. In her science class, Ericka had chosen to sit in the front row, left side of the classroom (facing the teacher). In her AVID class, she sat in the front of the room.

The General AVID Latinas in this study were Anna, Maria, and Victoria. Anna was an 8th grade Latina student of Mexican descent. She was of medium build and about 5’3” tall. Anna had fair skin and piercing green eyes outlined by dark brown eyelashes. Her long, wavy brown hair was typically pulled back into a neat full or half ponytail. Anna’s style of dress usually included jeans or shorts with colorful t-shirts or blouses and gold hoop earrings. Anna wore a thin line of black eyeliner and black mascara as well as flavored lip-gloss or tinted Chap Stick. Anna was the only girl and the youngest of four children. According to Anna, all children in the home were bilingual, however, neither of Anna’s parents spoke very much English. Anna had been placed in general track courses for all three years of middle school because she had scored anywhere between Far Below Basic to Proficient in English Language Arts, Math, and Science of the California Standardized Tests. In science class she sat in the middle row, facing the teacher, while in AVID she sat in the font of the class.
Maria was an 8th grade girl of Peruvian and Mexican descent. She was of medium build, about 5' tall, with a tan complexion, brown eyes. Maria had dark brown hair that reached the middle of her back. She took great pride in styling by curling, putting it up in an ornate bun, or pulling the sides back away from her face with a glitter, gold, or colored hairclip. Maria typically wore jeans or skirts with colorful blouses. She wore black eyeliner, mascara, and lip-gloss as well as gold earrings and two gold rings on each hand. Maria was the only female among five children from her biological mother and father. She had two older half-brothers from her father’s first marriage. According to Maria, she and all of her siblings were bilingual. Maria had been placed in general track courses for all three years of middle school because she had scored anywhere between Far Below Basic to Proficient in English Language Arts, Math, and Science. In her science and AVID classes, Maria sat in the farthest row away from her teachers.

Victoria was also a 8th grade Latina of Mexican descent. She had dark brown, shoulder length, straight hair that she often curled at the ends and pulled back away from her face. She curled her bangs and applied hair spray so that the curled over her forehead like a wave (I don’t know how else to describe this). Victoria had dark brown eyes and tan complexion that she perfected with liquid cover-up. She wore blue eyeliner, pink blush, and red lipstick. Victoria was the only participant that always had her nails painted, typically in dark colors including blue, red, orange, and black. She often painted her ring fingernails a different color than the rest. Victoria had four half-brothers that lived with her father. Each of her brothers had a different mother. Like Anna and Maria, Victoria had also been placed in general track courses for all three years of middle school.
due to her scores on the California Standardized Tests. Victoria sat in the last row of the left side of the room, facing the teacher. In AVID class, she sat at the front, left side of the room facing the teacher.

**Parent Participants.** During the time of this study, five out of six mothers were unemployed; Victoria’s mother worked in an office as a receptionist. All fathers were employed in blue-collar jobs (warehouses, construction (manufactured and single family homes), dairy/farmhands). The stark difference between these families was household size. Honors AVID Latina lived in homes with a total of 2-4 people (parents and children), whereas General AVID Latinas’ households consisted of 3-9 people including parents, children, and grandparents. For Victoria, her household size fluctuated depending on whether she was with her mother and step-father, where she was an only child, or with her father, his children, and his current wife or girlfriend in which they household could range between 5 to 9 people.

**Teacher Perspectives.** Teacher perspectives were also important to this study in that teachers provided data about student engagement in science, attitude towards science, academic progress in science, as well as their perspectives on how the girls in the study may have arrived at and maintained Honors AVID or General AVID status. Teachers were also in a position to provide their views of the role parental support, or lack thereof, may have played in the girls’ academic achievements. Of the three 8th grade science teachers at this site, two agreed to participate in the study. I observed in two of the three classrooms and interviewed those teachers. By the time I began my fieldwork, students had been in school for approximately four months and two grading periods.
Teachers were also a valuable resource in providing information on how the girls were getting along with their male and female peers as well as how often and what degree the girls participated in class lectures, labs, and related activities.

**Data Collection**

I conducted my research over the course of five months (January 2013- May 2013) at Eagle Mountain Middle School (pseudonym) in Southern California. In the context of this school, I investigated how these six 8th grade Latinas in a middle school in Southern California negotiated their social identities in relation to their academic achievements. The perspectives of the participants in this study provided insight into how these girls made sense of their academic achievements and failures as working-class Latinas. Burke and Stets (2009) state,

…we can best understand social behavior by focusing on individuals’ definitions and interpretations of themselves, others, and their situations. By identifying the meanings that actors’ attributed to their surroundings… and seeing the world from their perspective, we can understand why people do what they do” (p. 33).

Therefore, Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas’ perspectives were integral in explaining how they attained differing levels of academic success, becoming Honors AVID or General AVID students.

In order to gain these Latina’s perspectives based on intersecting NIDA social identities, I began with gaining access to the school through the school principal and district superintendent. Once access was granted, I began by observing in Honors and General 8th grade science classes. After spending a couple of weeks getting to know the teachers and students in these classes, I asked to speak to the girls in each class as they got ready to leave for the next period. After handing out 15-20 English/Spanish letters of
introduction and consent to participate in this study, I received 3 signed consent forms from the Honors science class and 3 from the General science class. I then began documenting observations focused on the girls’ behaviors, interactions, and discourse. I also scheduled initial interviews with each girls and the first group interview with all girls. I also scheduled interviews with each science teacher.

Observations

As a participant observer, I observed students in Physical Science classrooms and in the common areas of the school campus. I routinely took my place in empty student desks in the perimeter of the classrooms, where I was periodically engaged in informal conversations about class work or lab assignments. After my first classroom observation, I quickly realized that the clicking noise of my laptop keys was met with unusual interest and I feared it would distract students from course work and draw attention to me. From that point on, I quietly wrote observation data in my notebook with pencil whenever I was in a classroom. In the common areas of the school, I was often greeted and occasionally summoned (by study participants and their peers) to walk with student groups as they transitioned from one class to the next. I kept my notebook and recording device out of sight in common areas so as to not appear like a teacher documenting behavior infractions.

Observations allowed me to witness how Latinas negotiated their multiple identities in the science classroom and within the context of school and school-related activities. Initial observations (lasting one hour, three times a week for one week) served to develop context. Observing over a period of five months allowed me to see and hear
how 8th grade Latinas interacted with science (do science, talk science, and make sense of their science achievement). Once I completed the initial observations, I was better prepared to select the six Latina girls whom I observed and interviewed for this study.

Observations of students in Physical Science classrooms took place two to three times a week from December through May, taking time off for the school’s Winter and Spring breaks. During that time, I observed 2-3 hours per school day; one to two hours in the classroom and one hour in the common areas before school, during passing periods and lunch, and after school. I observed in two of the three science classrooms in order to facilitate in-depth weekly observations of selected participants. I was also allowed to observe in the science club in which two of my participants were members. The program consisted of nine male and female participants who were preparing for the upcoming physical science competition against neighboring middle schools. The observations during the after-school science club provided valuable insight into how the girls in my study interacted with their peers in a structured, team context outside of the classroom and proved useful in revealing how these girls negotiated their intersecting multiple social identities.

Classroom observations also proved useful in comparing how successful Latina students and struggling Latina students interacted with teachers, peers, and curriculum during lecture, labs, and related activities. During classroom observations, I focused on how and when girls asked for help with class work including labs as well as whom they requested help from (teacher, friends, classmates outside of their peer group), who they sat next to when given a choice, the frequency and type of classroom participation, and
language usage (Standard English, code-switching, etc.). Specifically, I looked for instances where girls may have been “gender passing” (Fordham, 1993, p.3-4) or silently resisting as discussed by Fordham (1993). Furthermore, observations in classrooms and after-school served to illuminate how girls perceived themselves as students and as members of peer networks and were useful in understanding what students revealed in the individual and group interviews.

Both observations and interviews also provided a forum for paying attention to how these girls use language. Like Carter (2006), I looked for minority girls’ use of Standard English in varying contexts. This proved useful in understanding if race/ethnicity influenced how and why these girls use or reject the use of Standard English with teachers, parents, and peers. This is significant in that it illuminated these girls’ sense of agency, ability to negotiate peer pressure, and acknowledge possible stereotype-threats about gender and race/ethnicity.

**Interviews**

While the focus of the interviews was primarily driven by what was seen and heard in observations, interviews were designed to allow for students to tell their stories of experiences with teachers, peers, family, and schooling. These conversations illuminated my understanding of students’ perceptions of self and peers, especially with regard to intersecting identities and academic achievement in science and other coursework. After completing one week of initial observations in physical science classrooms and the after-school program, I conducted an initial group interview with the six selected student participants. The initial interview served to find out what students
thought about themselves, science, their teachers, their peers and classmates. Interview protocols were structured to stimulate students’ talk about academic and gender role expectations, prior and current academic achievement, family narratives, and future aspirations. Girls revealed narratives about academic achievement, familial expectations for academics and future roles and girls’ refusal or willingness to embrace such expectations, as well as information about relationships with family, teachers, and peers.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the primary investigator.

The remaining individual interviews as well as all group interviews took place over the remaining five months. Each individual and group interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes to an hour, although participants were reminded that they could leave at any time. All interviews took place in a mutually agreed upon location. Conducting interviews over the span of five months allowed me ample time to reflect on the data gathered and write “interpretive commentary” (Stake, 1995, p. 66). Interviews were audio-recorded. I also took notes during the interviews. Participants were reminded that their identities would be protected by the use of pseudonyms. Every participant signed a consent form in English and Spanish when necessary, prior to beginning the first interview.

Group interviews over a span of five months provided ample data that proved useful in witnessing and understanding the dynamics of group responses versus individual responses. Since both Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas from at least two peer groups were represented in the group interviews, I observed and documented how the girls respond to questions about family, school life, aspirations, and achievement
in a group setting versus an individual setting as well as their perceptions about each other in terms of friendships, class interactions, and academics. For example, in Finders’ (1997) study, some social queens in a group interview told the researcher that they did not like to read a particular genre, but when speaking individually, they revealed a bit more about the genres they did like to read and why.

Interviews with teachers took place in their classrooms after school. I formally interviewed each teacher once, but had several informal conversations throughout the course of the study. Like Bettie (2003), I believed that managing the student/teacher divide calls for publically avoiding the students’ teachers as much as possible (p. 18). When she did interview teachers, she did so in private places like staff lounges where students could not see them. As previously stated, teacher perspectives were important to this study because they provided distinctive insight into student engagement in various classroom and lab scenarios, attitude towards science, progress in science, and how they see girls in the study constructing and maintaining their identities.

Interviews with parents occurred during the summer months following the end of the school year. The interview protocol for parents consisted of open-ended questions in which parents were asked to tell about the current and future academic and behavior expectations for their daughters. These interviews yielded information about familial expectations, gender roles, interactions with siblings, immigrant stories, current and past grades and academic achievement, and behavior in and out of school. More importantly, interviews at this point in the study served to follow up on data collected from observations of and interviews with Latina students.
Documents

I collected documents pertaining to the school events, grading policies, and academic and behavioral expectations for all students. These documents helped me to better understand how the girls in this study made sense of the institutional expectations placed on them and how these expectations may have influence their reactions and engagement with science curriculum, teachers, and peers. Documents included the school handbook, curriculum and work samples when possible, as well as brochures from office or student center, etc. Common formative assessments and standardized test scores, and student work from students in the study were reviewed and returned to the teacher.

Data Analysis

For this study, I borrowed from Gee’s identity categories (Gee, 2000) and Jenkin’s (2008) social identity theory to inform my analysis of 8th grade Latinas’ identity performances in school and their parents’, peers’, and teachers’ recognitions of them to understand how they came achieve differently as Honors AVID or General AVID students. To do so, I chose to examine how their academic achievements were mediated by their social identities.

Student and parent interviews were the units of analysis to accompany field notes of participant observations. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2003), “…there are distinct advantages in combining participant observation with interviews; in particular, the data from each can help illuminate the other” (p. 131). Therefore, the behaviors observed in common areas, classrooms, and in the after-school club were further explained via interview data and vise versa. Because “[n]arrative coding is appropriate
for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story,” I used narrative analysis to select and explain participants’ stories that reveal projected identity and discourse analysis to explain how girls perceived themselves in relation to family and peers (Saldaña, 2013, p.132). Narrative analysis is also appropriate for studies involving the analysis of identity development such as in this study.

Student and parent interpretations were important to this study for two reasons. First, student narratives were useful in identifying how the girls perceived themselves as Honors AVID or General AVID, working-class females of Latina descent. Furthermore, narratives served to tell the stories of the girls’ descriptions of their past experiences in school, their families’ immigrant stories and expectations, and their perceived career trajectories. Parent narratives were useful in telling how they perceived their daughters as Latinas and students and helped to expound upon and support the data obtained from student interviews.

Data analysis began with reading and first-level, “descriptive coding” (Richards, pp. 99-100, 2009) of transcribed field notes and interviews. I used predetermined codes that originated from my theoretical framework, Gee’s perspectives for viewing identity, to code my data. I included codes for instances (narrative or discursive) depicting each type of identity as suggested by Gee (2000). Next, I sorted through the data and deduced themes or topics (Richards, 2009; Saldaña, 2013) and patterns for each identity type by sub-group labeled Honors AVID and General AVID.
I applied narrative and discourse analysis to uncover patterns of instances where the girls and/or parents spoke about cultural practices, gender roles and expectations, grades, immigrant stories, and specific career goals and then applied analytical coding connected to the literature review. These data explained how students perceived themselves as female and Honors AVID or General AVID students. The specific words they used to make sense of their experiences were the focus of discourse analysis. I specifically looked for linguistic patterns related to the use or absence of academic vocabulary, code-switching, references to dating and romance, gender, class, and ethnicity.

Throughout data analysis, I referred back to my research question to maintain focus and guide my analysis with the use of concepts deduced from my theoretical framework. Therefore, I coded instances that described: 1) What it means to be Latina (N-identity); 2) What it means to be an Honors AVID or General AVID student, and AVID student, and an English Language Learner, all of which are Institutional identities ascribed by the institution; 3) How the participants in the contexts of school and home speak of/acknowledge Honors AVID or General AVID students (D-identity); 4) What groups support their identities as Honors AVID or General AVID students (A-identity).

During this process, I noted that identities began to intersect early on in the analysis, Gee (2000) and Jenkins’ (2008) premise that identity is a construct that shapes and is shaped by the constant interaction of various social identities. Indeed, the kind of person an individual is recognized as is under constant negotiation within the boundaries that serve to label them as such.
I coin the term *intentional negotiation* to describe the process by which Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas activated certain identities in given contexts within the middle school institution that they attended. While both groups of girls shared the same impetus for doing well in school (meeting expectations of both parents and school), I argue that this intentional negotiation of social identities looked different for Honors AVID Latina students than for General AVID Latinas and yielded differential levels of academic achievement within the contexts of their middle school.

*Stable independence* is what I call Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas’ and their parents’ envisioned future financial status. Throughout this study, both Honors and General AVID Latinas oriented towards achieving future stable independence in which they would come to secure careers or jobs that would afford them financial independence by not having to rely on their parents or spouses for money. Given this goal, Honors and General AVID Latinas negotiated their multiple identities as they mapped their academic trajectories.

**Institutional Contexts- AVID, Honors, and General Education Courses**

Eagle Mountain Middle School was built in 2004 and has a modern design. Each building of classrooms includes spaces called “pods” which serve as open, interior areas that include cabinets, sink, and whiteboards and are often used by teachers for collaboration meetings, lunch, and small group instruction. Each classroom has a large skylight and a wall with plenty of large windows facing the courtyards that separate one building from another. Both the skylights and window blinds may be opened or closed to allow more or less light to enter the room. Teachers and students appreciate the natural
light as well as the option to shut out some of that light when using the LCD projectors and document cameras during lessons. When asked to describe the campus over all, the principal stated, “This is a nice, newer campus... and I think we make good use of the technology that we do have” (Principal, February 2013).

Within the institution, student achievement in terms of standardized test scores and report card grades dictated students’ schedules including elective courses. Students with high-test scores (high Proficient or Advanced) were placed in Honors level courses and labeled Honors. All other students were either placed in General Education or Special Education tracks. Students interested in AVID, beginning at the end of fifth grade could apply and interview to be considered for the AVID program. Once accepted into AVID, students were labeled AVID. Therefore, the students that ended up in AVID were typically Proficient and Advanced students, which inevitably ended in the tracking of these students since the AVID classes were only offered a couple of period a day per grade level as were Honors classes. Therefore, students who were Honors English, Math, or Science ended up tracked with their Honors peers, leaving General Education students in their own tracks. If students were recognized as Honors and AVID, then they were tracked with their Honors AVID peers and the other AVID students with their General Education AVID peers.
Student designated English Language Learners were usually not eligible for AVID because they had to take a course in English language development which counted as their elective. Students that did not choose AVID or were not accepted into AVID chose other elective courses such as band, choir, and yearbook. These practices resulted in overrepresentation of Proficient and Advanced students in AVID and Honors classes and the underrepresentation of Basic students. Furthermore, this was in contraction with the initial tenets of the AVID program.

While all the classrooms were virtually the same, the available technology, classroom décor, seating arrangements, and number of students in each classroom was not. Most classrooms had document cameras, projectors, screens, and a teacher computer, while in others teachers were using antiquated overhead projectors. All classrooms had dry erase whiteboards and few had interactive whiteboards. AVID
classrooms were replete with posters referencing study strategies, WICOR (writing, inquiry, content, organization, reading to learn) strategies, college pennants, and student work. At this particulate site, the AVID WICOR strategies (writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, reading to learn) were introduced to all students through their core content classes, but students in actual AVID classes received much more intensive instruction in these areas. Tables and desks in AVID classrooms were arranged in groups of four to six to allow for students to work in groups and/or meet with their college tutors.

During the time of this study, I observed Honors AVID students engaged in lessons that included rich academic vocabulary, metacognitive practices, questioning tutors about approaches to problem-solving and revising papers, and in-depth conversations in Socratic seminars. The Honors AVID Latinas in my study took their Cornell notes, Socratic seminar notes, and annotations from their sessions with tutors and revised those notes either during lunch or at home.

Students in the AVID classrooms with Honors AVID students were engaged in rigorous lessons about essay writing, high-level problem solving, and computer skills, and participated in tutorials led by college tutors who served to help guide students in taking Cornell notes, writing summaries, editing their assignments, and developing self-help strategies. Socratic seminars in this class were facilitated by the students and included in-depth discussions surrounding articles related to current, world events, newspaper editorials, persuasive essays, etc. Socratic seminars typically ended with a summary of the discussion, provided by the teacher, and a writing assignment that students would complete the next class meeting. By contrast, students in the General
AVID course participated in Socratic seminars facilitated by the teacher. Only a few student voices were heard in the discussions, as the rest of the students left it to the outspoken students to share their thoughts. The discussions also ended with the teachers’ summary of the main points and the students were asked to write a brief summary during the next class meeting.

In both AVID classroom settings, students received information on the importance of a college degree. All AVID students also received instruction on applying for college and scholarships and on using multimedia computer programs. Because all AVID students received the same messages about the benefits of college and university degrees, all AVID students were recognized as “college-bound” by the institution. The institution helped to sustain this recognition by setting strict guidelines regarding academic achievement. AVID students that did not pass all courses with a grade of C or above at the end of each grading period were placed on AVID Academic Probation and a conference was scheduled with students’ parents. Students who failed to improve their grades by the next grading period were dropped from AVID and placed in another elective course. Students in this position were eligible to apply for AVID the following school year.

College-theme activities helped to involve the staff and students in getting to know more about local and national colleges and universities. Activities included making one-page posters that summarized the demographics, available degree programs, mascot and sports, and other interesting information about students’ colleges or universities of choice as well as morning announcements played on the television sets in
every classroom, every morning and delivered by AVID and/or ASB (Associated Student Body) representatives. My Honors AVID participants Barbara, Denise, and Ericka often delivered these announcements. Besides the pledge of allegiance, daily and weekly events were announced such as field trip reminders, dance ticket sales reminders, and band announcements. Behavior skills of the week were also broadcasted as part of a school-wide implementation of positive behavior supports to improve behavior in and out of the classroom. The weekly focus skills included detailed lessons complete with videos and PowerPoint presentations outlining the steps involved in getting the teacher’s attention, disagreeing appropriately, waiting your turn, staying on task, etc. Every Wednesday, time was also set aside to showcase Eagle Mountain’s teachers’ college stories (where they attended, their field of study/major, what they liked about the experience, etc.) as well as stories of past AVID students who have graduated from high school and gone on to be successful in college. On Wednesdays, the morning announcements included the AVID Binder Check Rubric that all students are expected to use to assess the organization of their binders. This is a school-wide expectation and grades are assigned for binder organization and Cornell note-taking (a note-taking system devised by a professor at Cornell University in the 1950s and used widely to teach students how to study from course notes).

AVID coursework and activities also helped students to see the benefits of achieving passing grades (C or above) and obtaining good jobs in the future. One such activity involved a trip to UCLA for AVID students who maintain good grades (C or above) in all of their courses. “I can’t wait to go to UCLA and see what it looks like,”
Ericka, Honors AVID Latina, told me the following one afternoon as we walked toward the lunch area,

It’s one of the only chances I’ll get to go see a university, I think, unless we get to visit universities in high school too. Maybe I can take the metro if I want to go back and visit again when I start looking at other colleges too. It will help me make up my mind once I decide on which degree I want to pursue. (Personal communication, February 2013)

All AVID students also received instruction on applying for college and scholarships and on using multimedia computer programs to complete presentations and projects. Because all AVID students received the same messages about the benefits of college and university degrees, all AVID students were recognized as “college-bound” by the institution. The institution helped to sustain this recognition by setting strict guidelines regarding academic achievement. AVID students that did not pass all courses with a grade of C or above at the end of each grading period were placed on AVID Academic Probation and a conference was scheduled with students’ parents. Students then had to get all of their teachers to fill out and sign weekly grade verification forms. Students who failed to improve their grades by the next grading period were dropped from AVID and placed in another elective course. Because students in the AVID program are chosen based on an application and interview process, students in this position would have to apply for AVID again the following school year.

I noticed similar disparities between the 8th grade Honors Physical Science and General Physical Science classes, taught by different teachers. Both classrooms had similar seating arrangements, with students seated in four rows facing the front of the class and two columns at opposite ends of the room, perpendicular to the ends of the
rows. The Honors classroom has clean and clear lab stations lining three out of four walls of the classroom, with student work neatly stapled on the adjacent walls. Teacher-written posters including the essential questions for the week or unit’s lessons hang toward the front of the room. The agenda for the day including lab title and homework are written on the whiteboards at the front of the class. The General Science room also has lab stations lining three of the four walls of class, but the stations are obscured by stacks of textbooks and crates of folders and student notebooks, as well as pencil boxes with necessary supplies for students to use when working in groups. These contexts were the background in which I observed Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas and were factors in how they negotiated their identity performances.
CHAPTER IV: HONORS AVID LATINAS- BEING SERIOUS STUDENTS

Overview

Honors AVID Latinas, Barbara, Denise, and Ericka, were observed in the contexts of their Honors Physical Science class, their AVID class, and the common areas of the school in which they enacted behaviors associated with recognition of their institutional identities as Honors, AVID, college bound, students. More importantly, Honors AVID Latinas performed academic behaviors associated with recognition as serious students. For Honors AVID Latinas, serious student meant being present and future goal-oriented. How parents, teachers, and peers recognized Honors AVID Latinas as serious students hinged on the work involved in maintaining this multifaceted social identity.

Serious Students are Present and Future Goal-Oriented

Honors AVID Latinas performed serious student by being academically goal-oriented as 8th grade, middle school students and by setting and working towards future goals. Honors AVID Latinas were academically goal-oriented which included taking coursework seriously, earning good grades in all coursework, making the most of their bilingualism, and forming supportive friendships. In setting goals for their futures, the girls engaged in serious college talk and rehearsed their roles as future college students.

Present goal-orientation

Honors AVID Latinas were present goal-oriented, careful to stay the course toward those goals. These girls performed identities that were conducive to academic achievement more often than did General AVID Latinas. Honors AVID girls performed
much like the Mexican-descent group of students Matute-Bianchi (2008) described as Mexican-oriented students that were “achievement-oriented and goal-oriented”, enrolled in advanced courses, earned above average grades, and maintained regular attendance (p. 417).

Taking coursework seriously. Honors AVID Latinas were well invested in the academic culture of the school that also served to help them meet their present goals and cement their future goals. In their Honors and AVID classrooms, students were consistently reminded that they were capable of gaining acceptance into one of the colleges of their choice and doing well in college courses by employing the academic and social strategies they learned in AVID courses (Hubbard, 1997). Like in Hubbard’s study of low-achieving minority students in the AVID program, Honors AVID Latinas were inculcated with the cultural and social capital they would need to succeed. For instance, these girls were learning the importance of organization and time management and the skills related to note-taking, studying, and essay-writing, and asking questions.

Because Honors AVID Latinas set goals for future university attendance and careers, they saw great value in schoolwork. Not only did they complete all assigned homework at home, they also spent time at home studying their AVID Cornell notes, diagrams and other drawings. Furthermore, these girls sought additional resources such as texts and online resources, at home, the school library, and the local public library, to understand concepts presented in class. In individual interviews at the onset of the study, I asked the three Honors AVID Latinas to tell me how much time they spent on homework. Their answers to this question served to underscore the seriousness by
describing how much time they invested in doing well in their classes and maintaining Honors status. Honors AVID girls stated that they spent between three to five hours a night on homework, but made it clear that this did not include studying. Barbara clarified the difference between the two as, “Homework is just getting the assigned work done. Studying is reviewing the concepts that were taught in class, looking at notes and reviewing the textbook and other books that help with the concepts.” Barbara, Denise, and Ericka reported that the amount of time they spent on homework each night depended on the number and complexity of the assignments. Studying also depended on the difficulty of the pending exam. None of the girls procrastinated on their assignments and adhered to self-imposed deadlines to get complete assignments and projects. For example, in an individual interview, I asked Ericka how much time she spent on homework each night. She reported the following:

It depends on the assignment and how many assignments I have all together. If I have one that isn’t due for a few days or is a project and another one that is due the next day, then I will prioritize and get the one that is due the next day done first, then I will spend some time on the project. There are times when I have stayed up really late to get something done even if it wasn’t due the next day, just because I want it done. Those days, spending four to five hours on one thing is nothing.

Their strategic approaches to completing homework and studying for exams along with self-imposed deadlines were evidence of the implementation of strategies taught in their AVID classroom. However, the fact that Honors AVID Latinas girls had made these strategies a useful routine made their seriousness strikingly evident.
Honors AVID Latina students’ performances as serious students were evident in their engagement with their coursework. When their General AVID counterparts and other peers were engaged in social conversations during passing periods and other free time, Honors AVID Latinas’ participated in ongoing conversations about course content and context. On several occasions, I accompanied Barbara, Denise, Ericka, and a few of their classmates as they left their Honors AVID Science class and walked to their AVID class. One example of this is an occasion when, on the way to their next class, the girls discussed the process by which to balance chemical equations. As they walked, one of their peers opened her binder and they all referred to her class Cornell notes when making their points about the steps in the process. As they approached the door to the next class, the girls wrapped up their conversation by stating that they would continue talking on their way to math class the following day and would point out the chapter in the math textbook that served to clarify some of the process steps for balancing equations. On many occasions such as this, my field notes captured the girls’ discussions:

2/11/13 As I followed Denise and her friends to the AVID classroom today, Denise and her friends began to discuss what they thought today’s lesson would cover. Denise suggested that the teacher was going to continue teaching them how to properly summarize their notes, while her friend thought they would be doing “binder checks” (checking a peer’s binder for organization, neatness, and proper Cornell notes).

3/29/13 I observed the girls in AVID today. All three girls were on engaged in their tutoring sessions, taking notes, writing on the whiteboards for their peers to see their work, and revising their Cornell notes. After class, on my way to another class, I overheard Barbara and her friends saying that they hoped they got the same tutor next time since he was really helpful with helping them revise their essays.
Honors AVID Latinas saw their current educational efforts as investments in their futures. Not only did they think about attending college, but also envisioned attending specific colleges with career goals in mind. This was also a clear indicator of present and future goal-orientation.

Honors AVID Latinas looked forward to opportunities in which they could practice performing their roles as futures college students. No matter the conversation topic, upon entering the AVID classroom, the girls would stop talking, make their way to their desks, and begin the process of getting out the materials they needed for the period. While the majority of their honors and AVID peers quieted down and promptly got their materials out when the bell rang, it was Honors AVID Latinas who made this a practice in being a serious student, ready to maximize learning time in every class period.

As Honors AVID Latinas envisioned what it would be like to be in college, they applied the skills and strategies they had been taught in their AVID courses. As I arrived to observe Honors Physical Science one morning, I watched as one of the Honors AVID Latinas, Denise, took out her binder and rearranged the papers within a section of the binder, as if cleaning it out. As I approached her and asked what she was doing, she turned and explained:

Denise: Oh, I’m just making sure my binder has the most recent assignments and notes at the top of each section. Mrs. G (AVID teacher) reminded us that we need to keep the most recent on top so we save time when we get to class and have to get out what we were working on the day before.

Rose: Oh, that’s a good suggestion.

Denise: I know. It seems so simple, but I think it makes sense. When we’re in high school, and especially college, we won’t have time to waste looking for our
stuff. We’ll need to get, sit down, and start to take notes from the professor’s lecture. That’s kind of stressful, so…

Rose: Do you think you’ll be able to handle it?
Denise: Yeah. I think so. I’ll have a ton of practice. (giggles)

While I had watched Barbara and Ericka engage in the same practice, my talk with Denise illuminated the fact that Honors AVID Latinas understood the current and future practicality of AVID strategies and their willingness to apply them.

Throughout my observations, I noticed that Honors AVID Latinas did not ask for help in the general classroom setting, but rather, asked their teachers clarifying questions in a one-on-one setting after class or called upon peers for clarification. I documented the following in my field notes:

2/04/13 Today, Barbara stayed behind after science class, waiting for the teacher to notice her standing by the teacher’s desk. After about a minute or so, they teacher asked Barbara if she had a question. I could not hear how Barbara responded or what she asked, but I could see her head nod as they exchanged dialogue. Barbara jotted some notes in her notebook in her binder, closed it, and as she walked toward me standing at the back of the room, turned toward her teacher and said, “Thank you.” I could see she was in a hurry to get to her next class, so I wished her a good day and parted ways.

3/29/13 Ericka stayed after class (AVID) to work with the tutor on a couple of math problems. I did not notice her ask any questions of the tutor during the class period, but I did notice she placed a check next to a few problems. I believe those are the ones she addressed with the tutor.

4/8/13 During science class today, while the teacher was talking, Denise wrote something on the bottom corner of her notebook page and pushed it slightly toward her neighbor. The girl next to her then turned the page of her textbook, read for a moment, and turned the book toward Denise. She then took the eraser side of her pencil and ran it under a portion of a paragraph. Denise nodded and jotted some notes on her paper.

During their last individual interviews, I asked each girl to justify why they waited until after class to ask questions or asked peers instead of the teacher. The girls had this to say,
Barbara: I don’t really like being the center of attention. I get really embarrassed. I am working on it because there are times when I get called on and I have to answer, but I am not looking to be the one everyone is looking at. (Personal communication, April 2013).

Ericka: I don’t like that everyone has to hear my question. I figure that if they had the same question, they probably would have asked it. I am quieter than most of my classmates, so I figure I’ll ask whatever questions I have left at the end of the period, individually. I think I get more information that way anyway. (Personal communication, April 2013)

In follow-up conversations with the girls, I asked, “I see that you are very quiet in class. What do you do to make sure you are paying attention to what the teacher is saying or to what you are reading?” the girls responded with the following:

Barbara: Well (pause), I’m not sure what you mean. I guess I don’t think about anything else but what the teacher is saying or what I am reading and what it means. I mean, I have to pay attention or I will miss something. I am a perfectionist, so if I think I missed something important, I am really bothered by that, so I make sure I don’t miss anything. I’m pretty good at taking notes and making sure that I get down all the information that I need to study from and refer to. I think that’s why I rewrite my notes at home, because I make sure they make sense according to what was taught that day. (Personal communication, April 2013)

Denise: Um, I am pretty quiet, so that helps because I’m not distracted by talking to anyone unless I am asking a question and that doesn’t distract me if I ask my neighbor really quietly. I like to sit at the end of the row so I only have one neighbor that helps me stay focused. Then, I constantly look at where we are in the book as she’s [the teacher] talking so I can see what she’s referring to in the book and that helps me write down the right thing. I guess that’s it. I try to make sure I have what I need to do my assignments and study for my tests. (Personal communication, April 2013)

Ericka: Um, I don’t like to look around the room much. I just like to look at the teacher and the board. I just try to get my stuff done and not worry about anyone else. When I’m reading the textbook, I just take notes as I read and that helps me focus. (Personal communication, April 2013)

As serious students, then, Honors AVID Latinas intentionally employed strategies consistent with being serious students. Their choices to be quiet and focused in class, and
seeking to understand course content by asking questions of their teachers and trusted peers in private served as further instances of their performances as serious students and the deliberate choices they made to behave in ways that supported their academic pursuits.

**Earning good grades.** Honors AVID Latinas viewed education as consequential to their future careers. They believed so in part because their parents had made it clear through their many talks about the future and in part because the institution made it a priority to convey such a message through Honors AVID and AVID courses and college-themed activities. Each Honors AVID Latina had a grade of above 100% in Honors AVID Physical Science due to her diligence in revising and rewriting AVID Cornell notes, getting 100% on tests, and completing all extra credit assignments and projects offered. B grades were not acceptable to Latina Honors AVID students, although parents had not punished them for such grades in the past. In the first group interview, all three girls stated that their parents did not typically reward them with material things when they earned good grades, but that they had consequences for “bad grades.”

Rose: So, for you girls, you don’t get a reward for good grades, but you definitely have consequences for bad grades? Like, I know you said, you can’t get anything below…

Denise: A B+.

Rose: a B+. Right. Or else your parents have a serious talk with you about that.

Denise nods.

Rose: Ok. So what about you?
Denise: As long as they know I’m trying they won’t get as mad, but they still want it to go up.

Rose: Ok. So, you give them an explanation and you put forth the effort to improve?

Denise: Mmhmm.

Barbara: But, I don’t like getting anything less than an A. I never have. My parents have never punished me for anything less than an A, but I just know it isn’t what I am comfortable with, at least not since elementary school.

Rose: Did you get bad grades then?

Barbara: Not bad, because I know that B’s aren’t bad, but I never liked getting them then, so since 5th grade, I don’t.

Rose: And how did you do that?

Barbara: I just figured out how to study, I guess. AVID has helped a lot since I got into middle-school.

Ericka: And for me, I think I just want to get good grades because I know that I need them to get into college and that’s my goal. My mom won’t punish me, really, but I would punish myself (laughing as the rest of the group laughs with her). I have to get good grades. There’s no other way.

This conversation highlights the girls’ seriousness about their education at the present time; they are out to attain what they consider good grades stating they “don’t like” getting anything below an A and reveal that the motivation is not extrinsic, but rather intrinsic as there are no impending punishments should they fail to earn A’s.
Because girls understood that the better their grades the higher their odds of earning scholarships and gaining acceptance into a university of their choice, working to achieve A-grades kept the girls on the path to achieving their present and future goals.

Furthermore, when asked if they thought of themselves as competitive, all Honors AVID Latinas replied that they did not compare themselves with anyone else, but rather with how they had performed in the past. Denise stated, “I am really only competitive with myself” (February 2013). Ericka coyly responded, “Um, a little, but only with myself. It would be too much pressure to compare myself with others.” Barbara stated, “Yes. I am very competitive. I’m like my dad that way, except I am academically competitive and he is with sports. I am constantly trying to outdo myself.” All three Honors AVID Latinas, then, were academically competitive with themselves, which again highlights the seriousness with which they confronted their coursework. Performing well academically was clearly to their future benefit.

As I sought to understand more about Honors AVID Latinas’ self-perceptions as students, I asked the girls what words they would use to describe themselves as students. Barbara chose the term “perfectionist”, Denise chose “focused”, and Ericka chose “determined.” In selecting these terms, typically associated with positive behavior traits, Honors AVID Latinas authored their identities as serious students. Like the African-American girls in Akom (2008) and O’Connor’s (1997) studies, Honors AVID Latinas developed a feeling of personal competence through academic achievement. These feelings of self-efficacy served to sustain their institutional identities as Honors and AVID (Lloyd, Walsh, & Yailagh, 2005; Lopez, 2006).
Not only was earning good grades a goal for Honors AVID Latinas, but *learning* was important as well. Classes that did not maintain academic rigor or in which other students easily distracted the teacher frustrated Honors AVID Latinas. The girls were not shy about telling me in which classes they had done a great deal of learning and which had been remediation and, therefore, a waste of their time. All three Honors girls agreed that two courses in 6th and 7th grade had been “a waste of time” because they were simply a review of what they had learned the year prior and had not learned anything new except for during the time the teacher engaged in “test-prep” for standardized testing. In a group interview with Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas (Anna, Maria, and Victoria) the girls spoke about this class from different points of view.

Rose: So, what’s your favorite class?

Maria: Mr. K.

Rose: Why?

Maria: Because he’s so funny. It is like so easy to get him talking about his family and stuff.

Rose: And you like that about him?

Maria: Yeah!

Ericka: (audible sigh) Oh my *go-o-o-sh*! Remember that? I couldn’t stand that class.

Barbara and Victoria roll their eyes and nod in agreement as Anna and Victoria laugh.

Rose: Why?
Ericka: We never learned anything.

Rose to Maria: So, you never learned anything either?

Maria: No, we do, there’s like special days when we learn.

Rose: There’s special days for learning?

Ericka: That is how it was last year. We only learned one week.

Barbara: Yeah, we didn’t learn anything in that class.

Ericka: It was one week we learned?

Rose: One week? What? In Mr.K’s class?

Ericka and Barbara in unison: Yes!

Rose: You all either have him or have had him for Language Art, too?

Maria: No, I have him for history.

Rose: And last year, you don’t feel that you learned anything?

Ericka: I didn’t learn anything in his class. I basically learned everything in 6th grade and the past year and in his class I basically reviewed that one week.

Barbara: It was such a waste of time.

Denise: Yeah, it was. Boring and a waste.

Anna: Yeah, she’s right it’s all review, but then there’s less work to do!

On the one hand, wasted learning time was a major point of frustration for Honors AVID Latinas. On the other hand, it was a welcome, entertaining break for their General AVID counterparts. This contrast further exemplifies the seriousness with which Honors AVID Latinas approached their educational experiences.
Honors AVID Latinas pursued content knowledge for the sake of excelling in current course content as well as for performing advanced on the end of the year tests, which served to maintain Honors status from one year to the next and, in the case of this year, to help them earn their spots in Advanced Placement courses in 9th grade. On various occasions, I found my Honors AVID participants at the local public library either checking out books on a topic covered in one of their courses or novels for pleasure reading. On several occasions, I also saw Honors AVID Latinas sitting alone in library study or conference rooms with laptops or textbooks, ear-buds in, studying for upcoming exams. In putting in the time to better understand course content and do well on exams, these students were exhibiting serious academic orientation.

Parents did not provide any material incentives or rewards. When in a group interview I asked the girls if they were awarded for good grades or for achieving in the advanced category on standardized tests, Honors AVID Latinas responded as follows:

Barbara: Not really. There have been a couple of times when my parents have taken me and my sister out for pizza for our awards, but not for regular report card grades or tests. They don’t really even know what the CSTs are, except that they’re big tests.

Denise: Same here. My parents tell me they’re proud and stuff, but we don’t really get rewarded. Like, I know people that get money and gifts and stuff.

Rose: And, how do you feel about that?

Denise: Yeah, I’m ok with it. I get new clothes and stuff when I need them and sometimes just when I want it, so it doesn’t bother me.

Barbara: I’m ok with it. I mean, it’s what we’re supposed to do. It’s kind of our job.

Ericka: I’m the same way. I get the things I need. I am not looking for rewards for everything. I think I’m doing what I need to for my future anyway.
Barbara: Yeah, there’s always Christmas and birthdays (laughing).

Barbara’s statement, “…it’s what we’re supposed to do” and Ericka’s, “I’m doing what I need to for my future anyway” are telling of how they understand their roles as serious students. Their investment in their academic identities is further highlighted by the notion that they perform as serious students for the sake of working towards their present and future goals.

**Making the most of bilingualism.** Another aspect of being a serious student entailed making the most of being bilingual in an academic setting. For example, when I asked each girl, individually, how they felt about being bilingual, Honors AVID Latinas reported that they appreciated speaking two languages. Denise stated,

Well, I see a lot of words in science and math and stuff that have Latin roots and my teachers have always told us that if you know Spanish, you can use what you know about Spanish to help you with the words you don’t know in English. So, I do that. (February 2013)

Ericka added,

I really like being bilingual. I feel like it helps me, but definitely, like, I think in English. I know it sounds funny, but I don’t think in Spanish at school and since I am always doing school stuff, I feel like I think more in English even though I know that speaking Spanish helps me understand more of what I’m reading in class, but I don’t really think about it that much. Then, when I talk to my mom and family, I just speak in Spanish. (February 2013)

Barbara summed it up this way,

I like that I can speak Spanish. It helps me communicate with my family and it helps in school. I’m able to tell the meanings of a lot more academic words, like the ones that have Latin roots, because I speak Spanish. I think it’s a huge part of who I am and where I come from. (February 2013)
In this way, not only were Honors AVID Latinas proud of the fact that they spoke two languages, but they were well aware of the ways they could use this knowledge to their academic benefit, thereby sustaining their work as serious students.

Honors AVID Latinas embraced their bilingualism. Because parents supported the development and maintenance of Spanish at home, Honors AVID Latinas chose to speak Spanish at home and English at school. While research has shown that minority students run the risk of being accused by their peers of “acting White”, a form of betrayal to their kinship or ethnic group (Carter, 2006), I found no evidence that indicated that Honors AVID Latina students were accused of acting White because they spoke Standard English and did not code-switch or choose to speak Spanish at school. These girls had learned to “affirm their cultural identities but at the same time recognize the need to develop certain cultural practices that are acceptable to the mainstream, notably achieving academically” (Mehan et al, 1994, p. 145).

**Supportive friendships.** At Eagle Mountain, Honors AVID Latinas did not make friends with all other Honors AVID students; rather, they strategically made friends with other Honors and/or AVID male and female students that they perceived to have the same levels of seriousness as they did. Honors AVID Latinas were not boastful about their superior academic achievement and quietly celebrated with their peers when one of them asked how they had performed on an assignment or exam. “Way to go!” and “That’s freakin’ awesome!” were expressions commonly used in the Honors AVID Latina friendship group. In fact, they were quite modest when talking about their grades and accolades.
I often observed my Honors AVID Latina participants, Denise, Barbara, and Ericka organizing their binders and backpacks as they sat with their friends at lunch tables and along the garden walls surrounding the green areas of the buildings. Rather than engage in socializing conversations about boys, peers, or home life like their General AVID counterparts, Honors AVID Latinas, socialized via academically oriented conversations. For example, on one occasion I witnessed Ericka’s eyes open wide and aghast as one of her friends began to ball up an old set of notes as if to throw them away. She yelled, “No! You can’t throw anything away until after the final for this semester! Are you crazy?!” To which her female friend responded, “Oh yeah! My bad! That would have sucked if I didn’t have them to study. Eh, I would have just called you to help me” (Laughter from all the girls in the group). In holding each other accountable for keeping their notes and using them to study for the semester final exam, Honors AVID Latinas maintained academically supportive friendships.

Towards the end of the study, when talking with all six Honors and General AVID girls, it was brought to my attention that Barbara had been awarded eight end-of-the-year awards including 8th Grade Student of the Year. When I asked Barbara if she was excited about having been honored in this way, she replied, “I don’t think I am the best student or that I deserve so many awards. There are a lot of students who deserve them” (May 2013). Talking about their accomplishments was something Honors AVID girls were not comfortable with. For example, I asked Ericka and Denise how they felt about their grades of over 100% in Honors Physical Science. They responded as follows:
Ericka: Um, I don’t know. I mean it’s nice, but it really isn’t a big deal. A lot of students are doing well. I try hard. It doesn’t come easy to me, so I guess it’s a good think to have that score. I don’t think about it too much.

Denise: I’m happy about it, but I don’t get too excited. It would only take one B to make that grade drop, so I still have to work at it. It doesn’t make me feel too comfortable. I’m not going to get a big head over it or anything. It is what it is.

While Honors AVID Latinas seemed to appreciate some recognition from peers and teachers, as serious students, they did not take their academic achievement and accolades for granted and remained focused on their working hard to maintain their grades with the encouragement of their peers.

Honors AVID Latinas and the female members of their peer group, dressed for school much like the mainstream, middle-class, White girls in their honors and AVID classes. Honors AVID Latinas, along with their White Honors, AVID peers, typically wore jeans and sweatshirts or college T-shirts, and wore their hair down or in a ponytail. Unlike their General AVID Latina peers, they wore minimal make-up (clear lip gloss), and wore no jewelry. Interestingly, Honors AVID Latinas drew parallels between style of dress and academic engagement or seriousness. During individual interviews, when I asked girls to describe peers that typically were not engaged in teachers’ lessons, girls described peers’ styles of dress parallel to behavior. Denise stated, “I think they like to get attention, so that’s what they’re looking for even in class. I don’t know, but I think shorts shouldn’t be too tight or too short.” Ericka took some time crafting her response,

Well, (pause), I, um (pause), I don’t really like to judge people, but I am not sure this is judging. It is just my opinion that some students, especially female students, some like to wear clothes and make up that makes them look older or more mature. They are so busy with ‘looking good’ (makes air quote gesture) and looking in the mirror during class that they miss important information and then freak out because they don’t know what to do. I’ve noticed that a few times in
some of my classes, but I really don’t like to look around much. I just focus on my work.

Ericka associates her observations of girls who focus on “looking good” and primping in class to the likelihood of missing “important information” that could prove detrimental to academic achievement. She further underscores her seriousness by pointing out that she has only made such an observations “a few times” because she is engaged in her own academic work.

Barbara spoke of how girls’ style of dress adds to others’ perceptions of them,

Barbara: We come to school to learn, so coming to school all dressed-up doesn’t make much sense. Besides, you should look nice, like clean, but not like you are looking for attention, which can give them bad reputations. You have to be comfortable enough to sit in class all day and change out in P.E. I think some girls think about looking good more than being comfortable enough to sit in class and pay attention.

Rose: What do you mean by, ‘bad reputation’?

Barbara: I mean that people can look at them like they are looking for attention from boys and trying to look sexy (giggles), I guess. People will judge girls that dress up too much like they’re not interested in school and more interested in, like, boyfriends.

Rose: How do people judge them?

Barbara: Well, like they’re not serious, or like they aren’t smart or intelligent and there are girls that are smart, that just make the bad choice to dress inappropriately and then end up making bad choices because they like the attention more than anything.

While Ericka associated girls’ choice of dress to lack of academic engagement, Barbara’s observations suggest that it is others’ perceptions of girls’ dress that may ultimately distract even “smart” girls from their academic goals.
By choosing to dress modestly, Honors AVID Latinas demonstrated what they understood as characteristics of serious students and consciously worked to gain the institution’s and their parents’ recognition as serious students. Toward the end of the study, Ericka became more vocal about her point of view as she further described her perspectives about females’ use of make-up and dress that she had come to understand as being detrimental to academic success:

Wearing a lot of make-up and dressing-up like you’re going to a dance or a club is too much. You can tell that those girls are looking of the guys to notice them. They just want attention. Then they get into all the drama and they fail their classes. (Personal communication, May 2013).

These statements are telling of the stereotypes that Honors AVID girls have formed about girls that wear colorful make-up and dress-up for school; both implied sexual desire, which, from their perspectives was in contradiction to the desire to do well in school and certainly not part of being a serious student.

**Future goal orientation**

Serious Honors AVID Latina students invested time and energy into their studies as a means to achieving their goals of becoming stable, independent, career women. With this goal in mind, they engaged in serious college talk and rehearsed their roles as future college attendees.

When planning for their futures, Honors AVID Latinas also kept plans for college attendance at the forefront of their conversations and, like the Mexican-oriented students in Matute-Bianchi’s (2008) study, knew that the choices they made in school would affect their future college and career goals. When asked, individually, to provide an example of future success, the girls spoke of their hard work paying off. For example,
Ericka specified she planned on getting in to Harvard, Yale, or Princeton to study physical therapy or education stating, “I have always wanted to go to an Ivy League college.” Ericka envisioned herself attending an Ivy League college and had made this her goal. Barbara described her vision of success as, “I guess having graduated from college, with the degrees that I wanted and needed, and already in a career that I want. That’s what I would consider a success.” Barbara also had a specific university in mind, UC Berkeley. She knew she wanted to attend a UC from the conversations she had with her sister and her own “research” in which she had also learned that entrance into ivy-league colleges was very competitive and that high SAT scores were difficult to achieve. Barbara further explained that she considered a career in engineering, although which specific type of engineer she did not know at the time. Finally, Denise stated, “I’d say that I would want to have a career that I really like, maybe in fashion, but I definitely want to have graduated from a university and live on my own.” Denise explained that she wanted to attend a university where she could take art history, art, and fashion design courses to help her meet her goal of obtaining a career in fashion. By setting specific goals to attend certain universities and study for certain careers, Honors AVID Latinas planned for envisioned futures by researching universities and professions, not only as a part of their AVID class, but on their own or in conversations with family. This intentional planning demonstrates that serious students are future goal-oriented.

As part of envisioning their futures as college-attendees, Honors AVID Latinas spent time talking about college with their parents. When asked what their parents expected of them with regards to school, they all replied that they had ongoing dialogue
about colleges and universities (sometimes distinguishing between the two), possible
career choices, and how they were preparing for high school and college through their
coursework in middle school. For example, Barbara said, “My parents just want me to do
well in school so that I can get into a good university and be prepared for the career that I
choose” (May 2013). Denise added, “All they really want is for me to go to college, or a
university actually, and graduate so I can get the job I want.” Ericka said,

My mom and I talk about Harvard and Yale all the time. She has no idea what I
am talking about because she says she can’t even imagine what it would be like to
go to a university or one of those Ivy-League schools, but she is really excited
about the idea of me going to one. We talk about it all the time. She doesn’t really
know what I’m doing in my classes, because she doesn’t understand the language,
but she asks me about it anyway.

Here, Ericka excuses her mother’s lack of understanding regarding her schooling
as a language mismatch. Valdés (1997), however, explains this as a lack of understanding
of U.S. schooling and, possibly schooling in general, a cultural mismatch. Because all of
Honors AVID mothers indicated that they had not had the opportunity to pursue
education in their home countries, they did not know what was involved in learning in a
U.S. school and, furthermore, what was involved in learning in an honors class or an
AVID program. The girls stated that they brought up the topic of college in conversations
prompted by parents’ questions such as “Como te fue en la escuela?” [How was school
today?] Having been in Honors and AVID classes, girls told their parents that their
classes prepared them for college. “My parents don’t really know what AVID is” the girls
stated in their individual interviews, “but they know it has something to do with getting
ready for college so they like it.”
According to the girls, other instances of college talk with parents were prompted by AVID-sponsored activities such as college field trips, AVID-sponsored College Day in which students were encouraged to wear their favorite college t-shirt or sweatshirt, as well as by their interest in activities that looked favorable on college applications. When, in individual, end-of-the-year interviews, I asked the girls, “How do your parents feel about everything you are doing now to get ready for college in the future?” girls responded with the following,

Barbara: My parents think it’s a good idea. I mean, they support me in everything I’m doing. I’ve told them how expensive it will probably be for me to college, so I think they appreciate what I am doing.

Rose: Do you talk about it in detail?

Barbara: Um, not really, but kind of. I mean, these are things they have never done before, so they don’t know exactly what it is, but they get the idea from me telling them.

Denise had this to say to the same questions,

Denise: I know my mom is more interested because she’s home and she picks me up from events, so we talk more about them, but my dad is really happy that I am going to go to college. He is already trying to save money and everything.

Rose: Wow, that’s great!

Denise: Yeah, but I am sure I’ll need scholarships and stuff, especially if I want to go away to college. I don’t know yet. Maybe.

Rose: And you talk about his with your mom?

Denise: Yeah, because she is really excited that I will get to go since she never did so we talk about what it will be like.

Finally, Ericka responded with the following,

Ericka: My mom has no idea of what I am doing to get to college. She really doesn’t, but we talk about it anyway.
Rose: How do you talk about it?

Ericka: Um, well I tell her what I learn about and what I see when I read or go places. She asks me questions so that I can tell her all the details. Since we, um, walk everywhere, we always have something to talk about (laughs) and it is usually what book I’m reading or my dreams of going to college.

This finding echoes that of Valdés study in that while parents supported the pursuit of education, they had little to no understanding of class schedules, tracking, or special programs and spoke of regret for not having had the opportunity to stay in school.

Clearly, serious college talk was an integral component of serious student as it was the platform through which Honors AVID Latinas, in a sense, tried to educate their parents about institutional structures and schooling practices, but more importantly made them aware of their goals. As we see later in this chapter, this practice also served as a way by which parents recognized their daughters as serious students.

Beyond the goal of attending college, Honors AVID Latinas envisioned attaining future stable independence. Doing well in school and attending a university that prepared them for careers of their choice would provide the path for meeting this goal. In the first group interview of the year, I asked the girls to talk about their plans after high school. When describing that plan, Honors AVID Latinas stated that they wanted to go away to college, earn their degrees, and become financially independent from family. For example, Ericka stated, “I hate getting money from people. I want to get my own money” (January 2013). Barbara and Denise echoed this sentiment when they stated that they did not want to grow up and rely on parents for financial support. In fact, they all hoped to
earn as much scholarship money as possible to attend the universities of their choice with little to no debt.

Honors AVID Latinas were already making decisions about what would look favorably on a college application when it came time for admittance and scholarships. As the school year came to an end, they spoke about enrolling in high school and community sports (even though they have never played other than in physical education), volunteering in the community, and joining school clubs. According to the girls, these decisions were consistent with what they had learned from their AVID teacher. In a lunch-time conversation about AVID, Barbara revealed that part of their AVID requirements was to do community service. She mentioned that her AVID teacher, Mrs. G. had taught them that not only was community service something that all community members should do, it was a deed that also looks favorable on college applications. “It shows them that you really care about others and you’re willing to help your community improve” (Barbara, May 2013). Honors AVID Latinas, then, considered these extra-curricular activities worthwhile.

In a second individual interview with Ericka, I asked why she chose to do volunteer work at the local children’s museum during her summer vacation to which she responded, “I don’t want to just do something that isn’t going to help me or help others. I want to do things during the summer that are going to be beneficial. You know, help me to do better later on when I am ready for a career working with children” (Ericka, May 2013). In her interview, Barbara said, “I want to be well-rounded so that when I apply for college, I will be considered for admission. I know they look for students that have high
GPAs and other talents” (Barbara, March 2013). Similarly, Denise stated that she wanted to do something like volunteering in the community, but she could not find anything that related to professional fashion design.

When telling me about their plans to volunteer, Barbara explained the following, “Well, I know that the more well-rounded a student is, the better the chances of getting scholarships and being accepted into universities because you have more to offer.”

Denise and Ericka also made similar statements adding that they had learned some of this information from AVID class and some from their own Internet research or from talking to older siblings or family members. Denise added, “I know my parents probably won’t have money to pay for me and my sister to go to college, so I want to get as much money from scholarships as I can.” Ericka stated,

I know there is no way my mom can pay for me to go to college and I don’t want to owe a lot of money when I graduate, so I want to try to get a full scholarship to Yale, Harvard, Stanford, one of the ivy-league schools. (May, 2013)

Moreover, volunteering in organizations within the community and strategically planning extracurricular activities that would look favorably on college applications is another example of how Honors AVID Latinas intentionally performed their Honors, AVID, serious, college-bound identities by choosing activities in which they could orient towards future careers of their choice. They also applied the knowledge gained from AVID to help them plan their envisioned road to college and, thereby, stable independence.

I conclude that the pursuit for stable independence served as further motivation for reaching certain levels of academic success as well as to orient Honors AVID Latinas
towards their future goals. Girls spoke of their academic trajectories as leading them on a gradual journey of independence, reaching full independence in adulthood with careers or jobs that would allow them to live off of their own earnings.

**Future Career Women, Not Mothers.** As future career women, Honors AVID Latinas were not romantically oriented. They did not necessarily see themselves as parents although they were open to the idea of marriage in the future. Honors AVID girls perceived future stability in terms of attending universities in which they would obtain degrees and, subsequently, careers that would not be compromised by marriage and/or children. At this point in their lives, they believed that marriage and children presented possible deterrents to pursuing their career goals. The girls had goals of attending Ivy-league universities, graduating with the “necessary degrees” (Barbara, January 2013) and working in careers that would afford them independence and enough pay to help their families should the need arise. For example, when asked what she would consider signs of “success” ten years in the future, Barbara stated, “I guess having graduated from college, with the degrees that I wanted and needed, and already in a career that I want. That’s what I would consider a success” (February 2013). When prompted to tell me what careers she considered, Ericka stated that she envisioned the possibility of becoming a physical therapist or an elementary school teacher as possible career choices and added, “If I have a college degree and a career and live on my own, I would feel successful.” Denise stated, “To think of myself as successful in ten years I think I would be living on my own, buying my own things, paying for my own apartment, and working full-time.”
In a group interview with all the girls, when talking about future career and family plans, Denise stated, “I think I just want to get a career and then decide if I even want to get married and have children. I want to go to college, graduate, and have a good job.” Barbara and Ericka nodded and uttered “Mmhmm” in agreement. Honors AVID Latinas looked toward college and careers and, like Denise, they were goal-oriented in terms of pursuing college-degrees that would facilitate attaining stable careers. They did not make marriage and family focal points of their imagined future-selves, but instead placed their personal goals at the center of their imagined futures.

Honors AVID Latinas were aware of what the role of mother entailed. During a group interview, Barbara expressed her views about marriage and family when the group was asked if marriage and children posed a threat to achieving their career goals:

I think women have a much harder time having careers when they have children. They are the ones who take care of the children and have to put them first, otherwise they’re not good mothers. So, they can’t give 100% to their kids and still be able to work and take care of the house. They are the main ones to do those things. It would be really hard to have a career and a family. I may get married, but I doubt I will have children” (Barbara, May 2013).

Ericka expressed the same sentiment, stating that she would possibly marry in the future, but would rather not have children.

Ericka: I’m not sure if I want to become a mother or get married at all.

Rose: Why is that?

Ericka: Because if you’re a mother and you’re married, you obviously have to be there, ok, cause men generally think you have to be cleaning the house and taking care of the kids, cause that’s your job, but they don’t think of it as a job, they think of it as an obligation, but they don’t realize that you do it because you want to not because it’s an obligation.
Rose: Ok. And so how does that obligation affect a woman from achieving her goals and dreams?

Ericka: Because if she has kids, she’s going to want to take care of the kids. She’s not going to want, well, here, if you’re a good mom or something like that you’ll want to take care of your own kids.

Barbara: Because it’s like a 24-hour job, taking care of a child. You can’t get distracted if not, you won’t be able to take care of your child.

Denise added her views on marriage and family by stating, “I’m not sure of anything except that I want to go to college at this point. I don’t know that marriage is that important to me yet.”

Honors AVID Latinas, then, not only saw the future career limitations they would face if they chose to become mothers, but they also recognized the responsibility associated with motherhood and the cultural mandate that the responsibility fall primarily on the shoulders of the woman (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006; Valdés, 1996).

Because Honors AVID Latinas were clearly aware, it seemed, of the possible detrimental effects associated with engaging in romantic relationships that could potentially limit, if not extinguish, their future goals, they were willing to put off motherhood indefinitely, but they were also willing to put off romantic relationships in adolescence. This strategic planning coincides with Hubbard’s (1997) findings of her study of African American high school girls in AVID that developed and employed strategies that helped them make academics a priority above all else, including friendships. These strategies included participating in AVID and putting off dating and/or monitoring the romantic relationships of their AVID peers so as not to deviate from their academic tracks. Similar to the Mexican-origin girls in Gallegos-Castillo’s (2006) study,
Honors AVID Latinas in my study are choosing to put themselves first, prioritizing their goals over social norms. One of the girls in Gallegos-Castillo’s study, Magdalena, comes to this realization and offers advice that “communicates to young women the importance of identifying personal goals and defining the steps to accomplish them. Failing at this endeavor brings regret… (p. 62). Gallegos-Castillo explains,

This notion of loving themselves by placing themselves at front and center is revolutionary given that women historically have been socialized and conditioned to care for others before themselves. Despite the heavy doses of romanticism and consumerism wrapped in sexy promotional media, young women are managing to see past the facade and realize the importance of steering their own life path and creating alternative messages. (p. 63)

In the case of Honors AVID Latinas, the girls had clear visions of what they wanted for their futures. Placing their personal aspirations at the center of their imagined futures allowed Honors AVID Latinas to consistently orient towards future goals they were not willing to compromise.

**Rehearsing roles as future college students.** Throughout the course of this study, it became clear that Honors AVID Latina participants embraced the lessons learned in their AVID class. Not only did they walk directly from one class to another engaged in serious academic talk about present and future goals, but as previously noted, they also continued this academic focus during passing periods and lunchtime.

As serious students, Honors AVID Latinas were focused on academics, not on socializing with their peers during class. Unlike General AVID Latinas, they did not interact with their classmates unless they were asked to do so, only talking to their neighbors when engaged in a lab assignment or other partner or group work. This behavior was also unlike that of their White counterparts, whom I observed talking in
whispers and aloud, passing notes, tossing objects, and touching up make-up during
lectures and note-taking time. The choice to be fully engaged in class was an intentional
negotiation of the classroom experience and an example in which the girls performed as
serious, college-bound students. Rehearsing their roles as future university students,
Honors AVID Latinas simultaneously worked on their present and future goals, taking
their coursework seriously to achieve the grades they needed to maintain their Honors
status and to ultimately gain acceptance into the colleges of their choice.

Recognition as Serious Students

Gee (2000) stated that identities are under constant negotiation and are heavily
dependent on the context in which they are recognized and activated. Therefore, without
recognition from parents and teachers, Honors AVID Latinas would not have been able to
maintain their identities as serious students.

With goals in mind, Honors AVID Latinas crafted their identities in line with
present and future goal attainment and engaged in the performances as serious students.
In doing so, parents, teachers, and peers recognized Honors AVID Latinas as serious
students.

Parents Recognize Serious Students

Because Honors AVID parents spoke with their daughters about their schooling
experiences, such as in serious college talk, they recognized their children’s primary roles
as that of student and were careful to provide support for this salient identity. Once way
in which parents provided necessary support for this identity was in affording
uninterrupted time for their daughters and other children (usually only one sibling) to
focus on schoolwork and related extra curricular activities such as participating in academic clubs, going to the library, and volunteering in their community. In doing so, these parents played an important role in recognizing their daughters as serious students who benefitted from engaging in academically oriented activities. For example, Barbara and Ericka volunteered at the local library shelving books and reading to children in summer reading programs and volunteered at the local children’s museum, activities that their parents supported by either providing transportation or occasionally chaperoning the walk there.

When I asked parents to describe their daughters in general, Honors AVID Latina parents referred to predominantly academic characteristics. For instance, Barbara’s mother described her as “trabajadora y dedicada” [hard-working and dedicated]. Ericka’s mother described her daughter as “muy seria”, “trabajadora” and “inteligente” [serious, hard-working, and intelligent]. Denise’s mother described her as, “intelligent and centered”. These descriptors are consistent with parents’ recognition of their daughters as serious students. Honors AVID parents spoke proudly of their daughters’ academic behaviors such as their diligence in getting schoolwork done and their ability to prioritize assignments and projects. All Honors AVID Latina parents were happy about the fact that their daughters did not have to be reminded to get their work done. In individual interviews, each parent responded to the question, “Usted tiene que recordarle a su hija que haga la tarea o que estudie? [Do you have to remind your daughter to do her homework or to study?]”

2 Interviews with parents were conducted entirely in Spanish, with the exception of Denise’s mother who spoke both English and Spanish.
Barbara’s Mother: Ella llega y se pone á hacer la tarea y á estudiar. No tenemos que recordarle de esas cosas. Si necesita ayuda de nosotros, nos pide ayuda.

[She gets home and does her homework and studies. We don’t have to remind her of those things. If she needs help from us she asks]. (Personal communication, June 2013)

Denise’s Mother: Not really. She gets home and gets to work. She has nothing else she has to do except her work, so she doesn’t need reminding. It is just our routine. I have to remind her to read for fun, because she doesn’t really like to, but not to do her homework or study. She wants to get good grades. (Personal communication, June 2013)

Ericka’s Mother: No, realmente ella sabe que tiene que hacer y lo hace. Nunca e tenido problema. Ella es muy responsable y termina todas sus tareas. Ella siempre esta estudiando y yo le digo, esta bien verdad, pero también tiene que salir a que le de el sol (laughing).

[No, really, she knows what she has to do and she does it. I have never had a problem with that. She is very responsible and finishes her assignments. She is always studying and I tell her, it’s a good thing, right, but she also has to go outside and get some sun (laughing).] (Personal communication, June 2013)

While parents did not know much about schooling in the U.S., other than what they gleaned from attending events such as Back-to-School Night or Open House, in addition to their daughters’ descriptions, they intentionally framed the home environment to support academic success by not requiring the girls to do chores at home. When asked what responsibilities girls had at home, all Honors AVID parents reported that they refrained from asking their daughters to do chores at home, except keeping their rooms clean. Girls’ only responsibilities were to focus on their studies and help to keep their rooms in order. For example, Denise’s mom stated:

The girls can help out when they have time, during vacations and during the summer, but they do not have any household responsibilities when they are in school. They only have to focus on their schoolwork and getting good grades so they can get scholarships to help them attend a university. We will do what we can to support them now and when they go off to the university (June 2013).
In providing their daughters with the space and time necessary to devote to their studies, Honors AVID Latina parents demonstrated that they, too, were concerned with their daughters’ present academic achievement and future college attendance.

Honors AVID parents also provided or arranged necessary transportation for their girls to attend schooling events or extracurricular activities. They realized the importance of their daughters’ participation in school-sanctioned activities that would help maintain their academic standing and/or provide opportunities that they would not have had otherwise, such as attending AVID field trips or participating in science club. In talking about their daughters’ extracurricular activities, Barbara’s mother explained that she got little housework done on days when she had to drive her daughter to the after-school science club or to her summer volunteering commitments, but that it was worth the time since it would help her daughter gain a better understanding of physics and prepare her for high school stating, “Es algo que hacemos con mucho gusto para ayudarle en prepararse para la materia en la secundaria” [It is a something we do with pleasure to help her prepare for this subject in high school] (personal communication). In an interview with Barbara’s mother, she explained why she and her husband were willing to drive their daughter and her sister to academic functions, to the library, and to their volunteer work during the summer. She stated:

En este país, uno puede hacer lo que quiere mientras tenga educación y aquí los niños se pueden concentrar en ser estudiantes sin tener las presiones que tienen los niños en México. Pueden ir a la escuela, estudiar, y tener oportunidad de educarse para cualquier carrera. No tienen que batallar como nosotros. Pueden crecer a tener una vida estable. Eso es lo que nosotros queremos para ellas, así que las apoyamos en lo que podemos.
In this country, anyone can do anything as long as they have an education and here children can concentrate on being students without the pressures that they have in Mexico. They can go to school, study, and have the opportunity to be prepared for any career. They don’t have to struggle like us. They can grow up to have a stable life. That is what we want for them, so we will support them however we can.] (Barbara’s mom, June 2013).

Honors AVID mothers were similar to the mothers in Valdés’ (1996) ethnography in that they too did not ask their children to complete household chores, considering that in their adult lives they would have enough to contend with and, in the meantime, should enjoy being children. Honors AVID parents, however, stressed focusing on schooling and career goals. They applied the “here is better than there” perspective (Matute-Bianchi, 2008) to motivate their daughters to do well academically with the hope of moving up in social class, from working-class to middle-class, through a stable, well-paying job or career. According to Matute-Bianchi, when immigrants utilize this perspective, it serves as a positive dual-frame of reference that is beneficial to focusing on school achievement and not on the societal forces that may work against them. In this case, Honors AVID parents’ positive dual-frame of reference and their belief in meritocracy worked to support their daughters’ dedication to academics and their journey toward their academic and career goals.

In speaking with Honors AVID Latina mothers about their daughters’ extracurricular activities, mothers described how they supported their daughters. For example, Denise’s mother stated that she was glad to be available to pick her daughter up from school when she had to stay late to study in the library or to participate in AVID field trips. Ericka’s mother stated, “Cuando yo no puedo ir por ella, dependo de mis
parientes par ir por ella para que pueda participar [When I can’t pick her up, I depend on my relatives to pick her up so she can participate]. Because Ericka participated in AVID field trips or had to stay late for science club activities and her mother did not own a car, seeking the help of relatives was perceived necessary assistance. If for some reason, she could not arrange transportation, she would walk to meet Ericka at the school, library, or other location and escort her on the walk home. Therefore, in encouraging and supporting their daughters’ efforts, Honors AVID parents helped the girls to maintain their institutional identities by recognizing them as serious students.

Parents of the Honors AVID girls in this study all expressed a deliberate decision to only have one or two children. This decision was based on the desire to meet, and hopefully exceed, the basic needs of the children and place less financial strain on the family. In conversation following the question, “Usted (y su esposo) vinieron de una familia chica como la de ustedes juntos?” [Did you (and your husband) come from a small family like the one you have together?], Honors AVID parents responded that they knew that they would be able to pay greater attention to one or two children in a country that required parents to invest a great deal of time to make ends meet. This level of encouragement served to maintain Honors and AVID Institutional identities and to support their academic trajectories.

**Exceeding Expectations**

Exceeding parental and institutional expectations were key components of Honors AVID Latinas’ recognition as a serious student. Parents, teachers, and peers had to recognize their deliberate performances in order for them to sustain the institutional
identity of serious student, a social identity that was key to their academic success and future goal-attainment.

*Parental Expectations.* Honors AVID Latinas and their parents reported that the girls were expected to take full advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to them in this country. As immigrants who could not pursue more than a sixth grade education in their home countries, these parents valued education and therefore expected their daughters to do well in school. For Honors AVID Latinas’ families, immigrant stories served as the basis for the positive dual-frame of reference Matute-Bianchi (2008) and were useful in implicitly conveying academic and behavior expectations. For example, in conveying her desires for her daughter’s future stability, Ericka’s mother reported,

Hablo con ella de las oportunidades que tiene en comparación con las que teníamos nosotros de chiquitos en nuestro país. Tuvimos una buena vida porque tuvimos familia, pero no tuvimos la oportunidad de estudiar más allá de la primaria, y con suerte, la secundaria que nos hubiera ayudado mucho para obtener más seguridad, verdad? Yo siempre le he dicho, “Estudia para que no sufras como yo.”

[I talk to her about the opportunities she has been given compared to what we had when we were children in our country. We had a good life because of our family, but we did not have the same opportunity to study beyond elementary, and with luck, secondary school which would have helped with obtaining more stability, right? I always tell her, “Get an education so you won’t suffer like me.”]. (June 2013)

Interviews with Honors AVID girls and their parents also revealed that expectations about behavior in and out of school were often communicated through conversations about the observed modeled behavior of others. Parents of Honors AVID Latina students reported that they talked to their daughters about friendships, plans for the
future including college and career, and subtly criticized male and female characters in the media and their community that displayed behaviors that they perceived as demeaning of females, racist, or rude. For example, Ericka’s mother had this to say when asked, “Habla con la niña sobre el futuro?” [Do you speak about the future?]:

Si, hablamos de lo que quisiera hacer ella con su vida. A mí me gustaría que escoja ella un carrera que le guste y que pague bien para que disfrute su vida. Ha mencionado que le gustaría trabajar como maestra o doctora, pero todavía tiene tiempo para escoger.

[Yes, we talk about what she would like to do with her life. I would like her to choose a career that she likes and that pays well so she can enjoy her life. She has mentioned that she’d like to work as a teacher or a doctor, but she still has time to choose.]

Furthermore, when I asked each girl’s mother, “Usted habla con ella sobre su vida como una jovencita o señorita?” [Do you talk to your daughter about her life as a young lady?], mothers had this to say:

Barbara’s mother: Pues, yo hablo con ella, pero no son muchas las veces en que hablamos francamente. Mas que nada, tocamos el tema cuando vemos que ciertas imagines en la televisión son de mal gusto hacia las mujeres. Yo le digo a (Barbara) que hay que tener mucho cuidado con como se representa uno, porque vemos que en esos instantes que le mencione, los hombres les faltan el respeto a las mujeres y eso no esta bien, y luego las mujeres no se motivan a mejorarse.

[Well, I talk to her, but it is not often that we speak openly. More than anything, we touch on that topic when we see that certain images of women on television are in poor taste. I tell (Barbara) that one has to be careful with how one carries herself, because we see that in those instances that I mentioned earlier, men will be disrespectful toward women and that is not right, and then women are not motivated to better themselves.] (Personal communication, June 2013)

Denise’s mother: I have talked to my girls about how other girls their age behave and how rude they are to adults, talking back, ignoring them, being just disrespectful. It’s all about manners and I want my girls to be respectful to adults and people no matter how old they are. (Personal communication, June 2013)
Ericka’s mother: Yo le hablo a mija sobre los errores que han cometido otros, como sus primas o, a veces, la gente que vemos en la calle. No se trata de juzgar a otra gente, si no de enseñarle lo que pasa cuando cometen errores serios. ¿Verdad? Hay mucha gente que se presta a ser discriminada porque se comportan en una manera muy vergonzosa. Y no nomás los hispanos. También mujeres de todas razas. Uno se tiene que respetarse y cuidarse, y cuidar a su familia. Hay tantas ocasiones de racismo, que uno tiene que tener cuidado con como se comporta para no darles mas leña para el fuego. ¿No?

[I talk to my daughter about others’ mistakes, like her cousins or, sometimes, people we see out in public. It is not about judging others, but to teach them what happens when you make serious mistakes. Right? There are many people who make themselves vulnerable to discrimination because they behave in embarrassing ways. And not just Hispanics; women of all races. We have to respect ourselves and take care of ourselves, and take care of our families. There are so many cases of racism, that one has to be careful with how one behaves in order to not add more fuel to the flame. Right? (Personal communication, June 2013)]

Implicit in these conversations are lessons about sexuality, racism, and educación, resembling those conversations described by various researchers including Ayala (2006), Gallegos- Castillo (2006), Hyams (2006), and Valdés (1996). For example, Valdés study of 10 Mexican families living in the border towns of Texas shows mothers engaged in giving their children consejos, or advice, via carefully crafted homilies (p. 125-128). These consejos covered a wide range of topics and served to guide their children in behaving appropriately, exhibiting educación (manners and moral values). In a similar fashion, Honors AVID Latinas’ parents did not explicitly set rules for their daughters, but conveyed their expectations through the evaluation of those around them, engaging in sessions of consejos, guiding their daughters to proper behavior that would meet their expectations. Essentially, consejos served as a present and future orientation strategy for keeping children on the right path now, inculcating them with particular expectations of
proper behavior, often anticipating the challenges that life presents for adolescent and grown women.

Furthermore, Honors AVID parents like the parents Valdés studied, wanted their children have the education necessary to obtain good jobs in the future and they saw the value and usefulness of a second language in their daughters’ future careers. When I asked parents, “Como le parece que su hija es bilingüe?” [What do you think about your daughter being bilingual?], parents stated that they appreciated that their daughters were able and willing to translate when necessary and were proud that their daughters could communicate with their family members, especially the elders. In her interview, Ericka’s mother said bilingualism and biculturalism mattered,

Es importante que se sepa comunicarse con su familia y que sepa de su gente. Ser bilingüe también le ayudara a salir adelante en su carrera (pause), pero también pienso que es muy importante mantener las costumbres de uno y no abandonar su cultura.

[It is important that she know how to communicate with her family and that she know about her people. Being bilingual will also help her to get ahead in her career (pause), but I also believe that it is very important to maintain our traditions and not abandon our culture.] (Personal communication, June 2013)

Denise’s mother replied,

I think it’s great. I’m sure it helps her in school with and a career and for now she can talk to her grandparents and other family. It's nice. I know they appreciate it. Being a part of two cultures is really cool for our girls and for us to witness. My husband and I take pride in being a family with two cultures. It is like the best of two worlds. (Personal communication, June 2013)

In addition, Barbara’s mother responded with,

A mi se me hace que ser bilingüe es tan importante para la familia y por eso se me hace importante que mis hijas aprendan de las dos culturas y de costumbres Mexicanas y Americanas. Claro que hay unas costumbres que no nos parecen, ya ve que aquí las niñas se van a dormir a otras casas, nosotros no hacemos eso.
Gracias a Dios que mis hijas no tienen ese deseo…Estamos muy orgullosos de ella. A mi me ha ayudado mucho cuándo he necesitado alguien que me traduzca algo.

[To me, it seems, that being bilingual is so important for the family and that is why I think it is important for my daughters to learn about both cultures and Mexican and American customs. Of course there are some customs that we do not like, you know that in this country girls sleep over at other houses, we don’t do that. Thank God that my daughters don’t want that…We are very proud of her. For me, it has really helped me when I needed someone to translate something.] (Personal communication, June 2013)

Honors AVID Latina parents recognized their daughters as serious students by acknowledging that they were bilingual students who currently benefitted from speaking two languages and would continue to benefit in the future.

Institutional Expectations. Within the institution, Honors students were expected to maintain passing grades in all classes including physical education, score at the high end of the proficient band or within the advanced band in the standardized test(s) that corresponded with their honors class or classes, and follow school rules. As AVID students, they were expected to utilize and provide evidence of AVID WICOR strategies in all of their coursework, provide evidence of maintaining passing grades in all courses, and participate in school sponsored AVID activities such as college visits and school spirit days. Furthermore, because Honors Science students took part in a more rigorous science curriculum (faster paced, higher-level exam questions, more hands-on lab experiments), the Honors Science teacher expected honors students to outperform their counterparts in science fair scores and standardized testing scores.

By studying course content on their own, writing, revising, and studying notes, and remaining focused on classroom tasks, Honors AVID Latinas did not merely pass
their courses as expected, but they earned A’s (95-100%+) in all their courses, including Physical Education. As stated earlier on in this chapter, the girls were observed taking Cornell notes, organizing their binders to facilitate accessing necessary classroom materials in a timely manner, and engaging in content-related discussions. Furthermore, as part of their AVID coursework expectations, AVID students were to research a college and create a small poster highlighting important facts about the college of their choice. Not only did complete this assignment, but they researched several universities and set goals to meet entrance requirements via achieving outstanding grades, taking advanced courses, and volunteering in their local community.

**Teachers’ Perceptions of Serious Students**

Because parents saw their daughters’ primary roles as students, Honors AVID Latinas were free to focus on their schooling and enacting the behaviors that would yield recognition as serious students by their teachers.

At Eagle Mountain Middle School, there was only one Honors Physical Science teacher and one 8th grade AVID teacher. The Honors Physical Science teacher and the 8th grade AVID teacher were impressed by Honors AVID Latinas’ dedication to making schoolwork exemplary and referred to them as “serious” students. When I asked their Honors Physical Science Teacher what made the girls high achievers, she described them this way,

> When they take their time to come in and sit with me, open their book and notes and ask me to help them understand a concept better, I know they are serious about learning. And it’s not that they weren’t paying attention in class and now need me to teach them the lesson again. These girls are really trying to dig deeper and walk out with real comprehension so they can go home and engage with the curriculum. This is why they get the grades they do. I mean, they have over 100%
in my class. My other (White) girls, some do too, but they do the extra credit and get above 100. They are not the ones coming in and looking for additional information and they are not producing the quality of work, in terms of artistic notes and going above and beyond like the girls you are talking to. (February 2013)

In turn, the support surrounding these identities served to maintain these identities in the everyday lives of Honors AVID Latinas as they worked toward mapping their identities as serious students and worked toward achieving their goals for professional careers and stable independence. Because these girls were taking the time to stay after class or go back after school to ask their teacher clarifying questions, the teacher perceived them as serious students.

In her interview, the AVID teacher also spoke of these girls’ attention to detail and hard work.

Rose: How would you describe the quality of work each girl produces for you and their other teachers, since you get to see some work from each of their classes as they work on it in here?

AVID Teacher: I see all the girls you are focusing on as very driven. They are determined to get their work done to the best of their abilities. I have never had an instance when I have doubted that the take a lot of pride in their work. These girls are serious. They don’t mess around. They ace all my exams and go home and rewrite their notes and you should see their drawings and diagrams. They’re amazing! (AVID Teacher, February 2013).

The teacher’s recognition of the girls’ efforts helped the girls construct their identities as serious AVID students, much like the girls in Barton et al (2012) study where they crafted their science identities as experts in the content largely due to their teachers’ placing importance on their identity work. Here, Honors AVID Latinas’ attention to detail and initiative in seeking to better understand the course content were academic behaviors that teachers valued. In recognizing them this way, the teachers also validated
the girls’ descriptions noted in individual interviews where they described the characteristics of serious students as those who got to class before the bell rang, paid attention during class, did well on assignments, and studied course content.

Teachers’ recognition of serious students also hinged on their perceptions of Honors AVID parents. When I asked teachers to describe Honors AVID Latina parents, they said the following:

Honors Physical Science teacher: They are more involved, they are stricter, they have higher work ethic, in my view they, I’m sure this is not a surprise to you or anyone that they, are always the ones that come to Back-to-School Night and everything. I’ll have just almost every single child’s parents here for Back-to-School night and other events like that. Whereas in my non-honors classes I’ll have maybe three or four parents or so and that’s been the case for as long as I’ve been teaching. (December 2013)

AVID Teacher: I have noticed that parents of first-generation students demand that their children be taught in English. They want them to have every opportunity offered to White students. In AVID, with my Honors students, I see this even more because parents know that AVID has something to do with them getting ready for college and when they know they kids are in Honors classes, too, they really don’t want there to be any limits on what is offered to their kids. I have had parents tell me this through a translator, sometimes that’s their own kid, you know? I get it. They want the best for their children and I do, too. (February 2012).

This teacher went on to explain that Honors AVID students did not receive English Development services and that she believed this could be explained in two ways: parents had purposely opted their children out of the program by not stating that their daughters spoke another language at home or by providing so much support that the students had met all grade-level standards and had been reclassified as English Proficient. In either case, the Honors teacher perceived that Honors Latina parents offered the type of support that led to their daughters being serious students.
The discourse related to Honors AVID parents was meaningful in that through it, teachers helped to support and maintain the recognition of Honors AVID girls as serious students because they believed the students’ achievements could partially be attributed to parental support. To some degree, teachers attributed the girls’ work ethic, determination, and drive to their perceptions that their parents held their daughters to high academic and behavior standards. This is contrary to what much of the literature says about Latino parents. Studies such as those conducted by Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996), Lareau (1989), Lareau (2011), Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003), Valdés (1996) and Valenzuela (1999) describe the challenges Latino and working-class parents face in accessing and activating resources to support their children’s academic achievement. These studies point to the premise that minority and working-class students may be insufficiently supported because their parents do not know much about U.S. schooling institutions and must learn how to navigate the structures within the school system to ensure that the school meets their students’ needs, yet often do not know what their academic needs are. However, according to the Honors and AVID teachers, the parents of Honors AVID Latinas I studied somehow knew how to support their children. The truth is, however, that the girls informed their parents about their schooling experiences and through this information parents were able to do what they could to support their daughters.

Because Honors AVID Latinas exceeded their teachers’ expectations, their teachers helped the girls maintain their recognition as serious Honors AVID students. Honors and AVID teachers made sure that Honors AVID Latinas were recognized for
their exceptional work. AVID and Honors teachers nominated their students for academic awards within the schooling institution such as academic achievement, top grade level student, and character development awards as well as within the school district for academic achievement, and within the county for overall top student. They also encouraged the girls to participate in academic competitions such as science competitions and county and statewide essay contests. Both Barbara and Ericka also participated in the after school Physical Science Club (pseudonym) in which they designed paintball darts and a launcher to hit a target board a distance away and then prepared for a later academic challenge. The competitions included middle school participants from local districts and took place at a local middle school.

Barbara was a site award winner for an essay submitted to the 14th Annual Student Write-Off for San Bernardino and Riverside counties (RIMS AVID). The topic was “Freedom and Opportunity, Dreams and Reality in the Emancipation Proclamation and a College Dream.” The assigned task: “How are the ideas of the Emancipation Proclamation contained/present in your college dream? What freedoms/opportunities will your college experience provide for you, and what will it take/has it taken to ensure the dream becomes a reality?” Her family attended the awards ceremony in Ontario, CA. At the end beginning of her 9th grade year, Barbara and her 8th grade AVID teacher were informed that Barbara had been awarded a United States Achievement Academy scholarship grant. Her AVID teacher had nominated Barbara during her 8th grade year. The non-profit scholarship foundation awards scholarships to “well-rounded students
who strive for academic excellence” (Personal electronic communication, September 2013).

Ericka, was awarded Honorable Mention for her entry in the same essay contest, but did not attend the ceremony stating, “I actually forgot about it. I’m really not the type of person who likes attention. I really don’t like awards ceremonies.” Denise did not participate in the science club, although she participated in the Associated Student Body as a representative for the 8th grade class. In doing so, she voted on activities that would take place on campus including ways to recognize students for good grades (3.0 GPA and above) and good attendance (95% and above).

While being recognized as a serious student involved participating in the contests and clubs suggested by their teachers, Honors AVID Latinas differed in their desire to participate in established academics norms of recognition. This difference, however, did not deter them from continuing to seek recognition for their hard work that translated into grades on a report card and worthwhile mentions on a college application.

**Peers Recognize and Support Serious Students**

Honors AVID Latinas’ peers also supported and recognized Honors AVID Latinas as serious students by asking about classwork and tests, congratulating their friends when they shared news about high scores, and talking about their futures in college. On several occasions, I witnessed Honors AVID Latinas’ peers waiting at the lunch tables, asking questions such as, “How’d you do?” and “What’d you get?” When they responded with “100” or “A”, the girls hugged, high-fived, and shouted, “See? I told you!” or “YES!” Honors AVID Latinas found support in their peers and served as
support for maintaining their recognition as Honors AVID students. For example, when asked in individual interviews about their friendships with their classroom peers, Honors AVID Latinas reported that they and their peers were careful not to detract from each other’s attention to their studies, making phone calls only when they needed help with homework and saving nonacademic talk for time between classes and the occasional weekend get-together. Ericka stated, “We call each other for help on homework during the week, but we don’t talk long” (February 2013). Barbara added, “I don’t typically call my classmates or friends on the phone. We usually just talk during passing periods on our way to class or at lunch” (January 2013). Finally, Denise stated, “I call my best friend and we help each other...We have only been to each other’s houses a couple of times” (March 2013). This is telling of the support system Honors AVID students received from and provided for their peers (Mehan, et al., 1996). As I previously mentioned, this support system is critical to the academically oriented behaviors that these girls must enact in order to work towards their future goals.

In a group interview, Ericka summarized the group’s views about lasting friendships,

We are always talking about going away to college and how we may or may not keep in touch with each other. We know that our friendships are probably temporary, just for now. We may not even see each other next year even though we’ll be at the same high school. We’ll be in different classes and doing different activities. We’re ok with that, although it’ll kind of be sad. (Ericka, May 2013)

Within this support framework, Honors AVID Latinas and their peers kept the idea of attending college at the forefront by engaging in discussions about future plans and agreeing that they would move on to higher education, understanding that their
current friendships and peer networks served their purpose at the moment. Again, this peer support network resembles that found in the scholarly work of Conchas (2006), Hubbard (1997), Horvat and Lewis (2003), Mehan et al (1996), and O’Connor (1997) in which students build supportive relationships with peers enrolled in similar academic programs as well as with other peers with whom they can share their academic successes.

**Summary**

Honors AVID Latinas performed academic behaviors associated with recognition as *serious* students in the contexts of school and home. For Honors AVID Latinas, *serious* student meant being present and future goal-oriented. Present-goal orientation was evident in how these girls applied the skills and strategies learned in AVID to study course content, complete assignments, and earn A-grades. The girls’ seriousness was evident in the importance they placed on learning time, making the most of their bilingualism, and maintaining mutually supportive friendships. Most important, however, is the fact that these girls primarily identify as serious students and were recognized as such by parents, teachers, and peers in and out of school. This recognition, in turn, mediated their high academic achievement.
CHAPTER V: General AVID Latinas- Being Good Students and Good Girls

Overview

General AVID Latinas, Anna, Maria, and Victoria were observed in the contexts of their General Education Physical Science class, their AVID class, and the common areas of the school. Unlike Honors AVID Latinas whose most salient social identity work and recognition by parents, teachers, and peers was that of serious students, General AVID Latinas enacted behaviors associated with recognition as good students and good girls. For these girls, their interpretations of good student meant doing well in school, being well behaved, and being future oriented. Their parents, however, privileged social behavior over academics and, therefore, recognized their daughters’ enactments of good student as good girl performances. This chapter describes how General AVID Latinas negotiated the dual-identity of good students and good girls.

Doing Well in School

General AVID Latinas identified as good students primarily because they were earning passing grades and behaved well in school, and were not focused on romantic relationships that would compromise their recognition as good girls. Therefore, these girls performed as good students because they perceived that doing so fit their parents’ expectations of good girls.

At school, General AVID girls saw value in completing homework because it meant earning a passing grade and not getting negative attention (a phone call to parents) from parents or teachers. They completed their AVID Cornell notes and studied their notes the night before tests or on their way to take a test. In a group interview with all
participants, all three General AVID Latinas admitted to often “waiting until the last minute” to prepare for tests, which they also acknowledged as going against the strategies taught in AVID (May 2013). Victoria added,

It’s not, like, the best way to do it, but sometimes you don’t have a choice. We have so many classes and, anyway, things are, like, fresher when you just read them, you know? (May, 2013)

So, while they acknowledged that procrastinating was not the strategy they had been taught in AVID, their goal was to pass the test and ultimately the class. This is in sharp contrast to Honors AVID Latinas who prioritized completing homework assignments and projects and studying for tests with the goal of obtaining the highest grades possible.

In another example of this contrast, General AVID girls simply sought to do what was necessary to pass the class with C or higher, resorting to the Internet for videos that would “show how to understand it better” (Maria, February 2013) and “explain with animations, not just talk to us like the teacher” (Anna, February 2013). Honors AVID Latinas, on the other hand, sought to further their understanding of course content by going to the library, reading and revising their notes well in advance of tests, and asking peers and teachers for clarification after class. When I asked General AVID Latinas why they don’t ask questions in class, Vanessa explained the following:

Victoria: Oh my god! Are you kidding? We would never just get the answer. He would go on and on and on and we’d just be more confused. Forget it. I’ll figure it out on my own or on YouTube! (Laughing)

Rose: So, your teacher uses too many words to try to answer your question or (interrupted)
Victoria: Yeah! He, like, he will supposedly start to answer, but he just gives us this big ol’ long explanation. The only time it’s good to ask a question is when you want him to start talking about his life and not science. Then, we can just kick back and listen to him if we want. The boys do that sometimes. They ask questions to get him distracted so we don’t have to do any work that period. We always get behind. If he just answered the questions or just taught us the science in an easier way to understand, it wouldn’t be so hard. But, I still get a good grade in his class, so I guess I’m happy with that.

Rose: Is it ever because you’re embarrassed to ask a question or is it always because he takes so long to possibly get to an answer?

Victoria: Well, I guess sometimes I get embarrassed because I, like, wasn’t listening, you know. But, mostly it’s because I don’t want to get the big ol’ explanation. I might just ask my neighbor, like, “What did he say, but then, I don’t want to get in trouble for talking. Oh my gosh! It’s like so much, you know. Just tell me what I need to know or give me the handout! I just need to pass, you know. That’s why it’s like, easier to figure it out, get it from the book or someone else, or just look it up online.

Rose: So that’s the goal, right? To pass?

Victoria: Well, yeah! You know, you just want to do good enough, well, you know, not barely pass, but pass. Like, not a C-, ‘cause that’s too close, but pass so you can keep passing. I don’t know. I’m not a fan of science, but I need to keep my grades up, like GPA and stuff so I don’t get on academic probation or whatever.

Being quiet in class, not engaging with the teacher, and getting the teacher off-topic, then, did not stand in the way of getting passing grades. Despite these behaviors, General AVID Latinas could still perform good student in such a way as to the pass the class.

With regard to homework, General AVID Latinas stated that they worked on it in bed before falling asleep, before school, in class minutes before it was due, or copied parts from classmates. Anna, in particular, said she completed her homework when her brothers were not around and she was done with helping her mother, stating,

I just do it when no one is around to bug me. Actually, I go in my room at night, get in bed, and just get it done. If I can’t finish it, I just, like, ask someone in the
morning or something, or in a passing period. I copy sometimes, but most of the time, I let someone copy mine. I know I shouldn’t, but I we just want to get it in. You know? (March 2014).

To perform good student, Anna found a way to meet the institutional and parental expectations for turning in her work, doing it at night or copying, and she did so somewhat undercover. Neither her parents nor her brothers knew she did so.

So, to understand course content that they needed to know for a test, General AVID Latinas did not ask questions in class, but sought help from Internet videos on their cellphones where they could control their own learning, selecting the videos that made sense to them and prepared them to complete and pass the necessary assignments and tests. They also completed homework alone at home or by copying from a classmate. This strategy is similar to the work of Finders’ (1997) “social queens” that worked to avoid discipline at home by working primarily alone to meet academic expectations.

General AVID Latinas performed good student based on their interpretations of their parents’ expectations and their recognition of them as “good girls” (to be explained later in this chapter). For example, Victoria stated the following when, in a group interview, the girls were asked what they wanted to get out of school:

You know, I think we just want to do good in school. I mean well, in school. I know my mom wants me to get A’s if I can, but she’ll take a C. You know, she wants me to be a good student, not flunk my classes. Plus, teachers post grades in the class, so, even though they only have our lunch ID, people know what you got. It’s embarrassing! So, it’s just better to pass. (May 2013)

Here, Victoria’s explanation reveals much about what she perceives as qualities of a good student. Beginning with the self-correction of grammar, Victoria demonstrates that she is aware of the mainstream requisite of speaking Standard English and her willingness to
acquiesce to that expectation. This quote also highlights Victoria’s understanding of how her mother and peers might recognize good student. For Victoria, there is no need to work to get A’s, when she clearly knows that her mother will accept C’s.

Like Honors AVID Latinas, General AVID Latinas were also invested in the school culture that promoted practicing the AVID WICOR strategies to pave a college-bound path. However, the degree to which good General AVID Latinas were invested was quite different from serious Honors AVID Latinas. For General AVID girls, like for Honors AVID Latinas, the AVID program should have prepared them for the academic demands of high school so they would be ready to go to college if they chose to do so. However, for General AVID Latinas, in particular, the AVID program helped these students maintain their recognition as good students because students in the AVID program had to earn passing grades in all of their courses. General AVID Latinas were held accountable to the programs’ requirements, and thereby their parents’ because the AVID teacher would not have to call home or send home a notice to be signed acknowledging that the girls had not earned passing grades.

General AVID Latinas had to balance responsibilities at home with the work necessary to pass their courses. They were expected to take on responsibilities in their homes and at school, whereas their brothers had little to no responsibility to either. According to these students, relationships with siblings included much teasing about school or being “stupid” as Maria told me in an individual interview (February 2013). Victoria said that her younger brothers teased her about having or not having boyfriends (February, 2013). Choosing to retort in this fashion implies that the girls understood
good student as an indicator of accomplishment involving not only passing grades, but also good behavior. In another example, Anna referred to her superior academic achievement in comparison to her brother, revealing that good students also have an academic orientation, albeit eclipsed by a focus on behavior:

Anna: I have three older brothers, but like, I’m not a loser like them (laughing), you know? I’m a good student, compared to them. Like, I don’t get into problems like them and I’m staying in school. One of them barely has like a 2.0. (Personal communication, February 2013)

Here, Anna defines her perception of “good student” as one who avoids getting into “problems” and earns passing grades. In all instances, the girls defended themselves by framing themselves as good students, talking about how well they were doing in school and, in many cases, how much better they were doing than their siblings. Furthermore, in these examples, General AVID Latinas underscored another understanding of “good student”, performing better than their brothers. In employing these comparisons, the girls highlight their individual identities as “good student”, emphasizing the differences between their brothers’ behavior and academic achievement and their own (Jenkins, 2008).

**Well-behaved Good Students**

General AVID Latinas understood good student to mean being well behaved at school. To that end, Maria, Anna, and Victoria preferred going virtually unnoticed in the classroom. They did not seek to engage in classroom academic talk with the teacher and, instead, engaged in quiet off-task behaviors.

For General AVID Latinas, paying attention in class was not as important as getting the assignments done, even if it meant copying a classmate’s work. In fact, I often
observed General AVID Latinas copying a neighbor or friend’s assignment, chewing gum, sleeping, texting, and day-dreaming, all of which they deemed acceptable practices as long as they were not being “disrespectful” to the teacher, as Anna described,

Rose: So, I noticed that you and some other girls put your heads down during class and even fall asleep sometimes.

Anna: Yeah, it’s so boring in there!

Rose: (Laughing) Ok, well, but don’t you worry about getting in trouble?

Anna: Yeah, a little, but he usually just tells us to put our heads up and then we do. I mean, really? It’s not that he is so exciting when he’s up there.

Rose: What about texting in class and chewing gum and things like that? Do you do that too, sometimes? I mean, I haven’t seen you texting, but I saw other girls.

Anna: Yeah, sometimes.

Rose: Who do you text?


Rose: And, do you know you are breaking a school rule when you do that?

Anna: Yeah, but it’s not that big a deal. I’m not on my phone, like all the time. And, I am not, like, being disrespectful to the teacher.

Rose: (Laughing) You don’t think so?

Anna: (Laughing) Nooooo! I mean, it’s not like I’m telling him off. That would be disrespectful. I mean, I don’t know, maybe, but not really. I don’t think so. Disrespect is when you really, like, behave bad. (May, 2013)

By operating under their definition of disrespectful, General AVID Latinas were able to perform their understanding of good students, which included two distinct components, academic (passing classes) and social behavior (good behavior). This was in contrast to their Honors AVID Latina counterparts that performed serious student,
which was embodied by academic behavior. Furthermore, while they did not overtly oppose schooling, they did oppose certain rules as evidenced by their willingness to break them without getting caught and compromising their good student status. These students were aware of the rules they were breaking, but did not consider their violations a huge offense. Maria explained,

I don’t think chewing gum is a big deal. I know they say we’re not supposed to...that it’s a rule or whatever, but it’s just gum. It’s not that big a deal (May 2013).

The girls considered challenging the teacher’s authority, raising their voices, mocking, and cussing at the teacher disrespectful behavior. They had arrived at this understanding based on their parents’ experiences with disciplining their male siblings as evidenced by their comparisons to their brothers’ behavior. Therefore, girls had learned that their parents valued doing well and behaving well in school and, therefore, were practices worth maintaining.

General AVID Latinas valued their friendships. Their focus on their social interactions contributed to the level of investment in their coursework. Anna, Maria, and Victoria described their peer relationships as equally and, often more, important to the overall schooling experience. Because their focus was on the social aspect of schooling versus the academic, their enactments as good students versus Honors AVID Latinas’ serious students, served them well in balancing scholastic demand with social demands. When I asked each girl to describe her favorite part of the school day, all General AVID Latinas responses concentrated on social interactions with friends. For example, Anna stated, “Like, my favorite part is my friends. I like talking to my friends and stuff”
(February, 2013). Maria’s response to the same question prompted a discussion about the importance peer relationships played in getting through the school day:

Rose: What’s your favorite part of the school day?

Maria: My friends…because then the day doesn’t feel so long and boring. I would go crazy without having someone to talk to.

Rose: You talk to your friends a lot?

Maria: Yeah.

Rose: What do you talk about?

Maria: Everything. We talk about our families, our friends, our classes, boys, but we try to stay away from drama!

Rose: What drama?

Maria: Like when one girl likes a guy and then other girls get jealous and stuff. Or, two girls like the same guy. That’s drama. It’s funny sometimes, but it gets old.

Rose: Do you think your friends distract you from getting your schoolwork done or support you?

Maria: Both. (laughing)

Rose: Both? How?

Maria: Well, like, if we’re in the same class, I can get distracted by them talking to me or passing notes, but sometimes we help each other get our work done.

Rose: Do you copy their work or do they copy yours?

Maria: Sometimes, but mostly we just try to get it done because we know if we get in trouble when report cards come, then we can’t talk on our cellphones. So, we help each other out, too.

Rose: Ok, so if you get your work done and keep up your grades, you can talk to your friends after school on your cell phone?

Maria: Yeah, we have unlimited text, so we do that.
Rose: What would happen if you didn’t get to text on the phone after school, like, if you got bad grades?

Maria: Oh my god! That happened to me once! I was going crazy and it actually made it worse! I was all depressed and stuff and didn’t want to do my work.

Rose: So, what happened? Did you fall behind and get in more trouble?

Maria: A little, but I finally, like, decided to pick up my grades so I could get my phone back, but it was hard. It really sucked. I need to have my friends at school to make school better. Like, I could never move. It would be really hard to start again. I’m glad that most of my friends and me are going to the same high school.

Part of performing as good students involved slightly controlled socializing. It was acceptable to get distracted by talking and passing notes in class and it was also acceptable to copy peers’ work in order to avoid becoming disconnected from socializing via text messages. However, it was not acceptable to become involved in “drama.” The girls’ had a heightened sense of concern for keeping up their grades, performing good student, because they would lose privileges that allowed them to socialize outside of school, not because it could potentially hurt their overall academic achievement or have implications on their futures.

General AVID girls were occasionally allowed to go out with their friends, but did so under several restrictions. All these girls reported that they were not allowed to include boys in their outings with friends but could be included in family celebrations since there were plenty of adults to supervise interactions. When spending time with friends outside of school, General AVID Latinas were only allowed to join their friends for a specific amount of time. For example, if girls went to the movies with their female friends, parents or older siblings would drop them off at the movie theater a short time
before the movie started and picked them up shortly after the movie ended. General AVID Latinas were similar to Mendoza-Denton’s (2008) “piporras” in that General AVID parents closely supervised and protected their daughter so as to conserve their femininity and, specifically, their good-girlness.

General AVID girls further contended that there were major consequences for them if they earned low grades or were caught in romantic relationships. For example, during the year of this study, Maria got by with B’s and C’s under the constant threat that her parents would cut her hair like they had the previous year when she failed all of her classes. At the time of her failing grades, her hair had grown down to her waist and her parents had it cut to just above her shoulders. This threat was a major concern for Maria. She stated that when a girl takes time to do her hair “nice”, it makes her look “presentable, like she cares about herself and wants to look nice or professional for school, but not like she’s going to a party…that’s what my dad says” (Maria, February 2013). Maria reported that her parents had made it clear that she was not at school to impress anyone, but that she was at school to get an education, which based on her experience, meant earning passing grades and behaving well. Therefore, being a good student (earning passing grades) was coupled with being a good girl (meeting their parents behavioral expectations).

Dressing appropriately was another way that General AVID Latinas performed good student. As good students, they were at school to learn and not get attention from boys and could speak to the ways that dress and grooming influenced the how people perceived them and their peers. Echoing their parents’ homilies, girls explained
appropriate dress for school. According to these students, if girls wore form-fitting clothing that “show everything” then they were not decent girls and they were probably bound for trouble, because they were getting the attention of boys, which increased the likelihood of becoming pregnant early on. General AVID girls often referred to their parents’ suggestions for dressing appropriately when going to school and not dressing as if they were going to a party. “I like to look nice, but for myself. I am not looking to look good for anybody. They guys here are stupid anyway and I’m not ready to be dating anybody here.” (Victoria, February 2013).

Victoria goes on to describe her current understanding of dating, “crushes”, not having sex; but also her understanding of being a good student, doing good in school and not having sex. In the following excerpt from a group interview, Victoria compares herself to her father and comments about her father’s restrictions about dating:

Victoria: Whatever. I’ve had boyfriends that my mom knows about, like crushes and stuff. And my dad doesn’t have to know anything. Who is he to talk? I’m already doing better than they did when they were my age, you know?

Rose: What do you mean by, “better”?

Victoria: Well, like, I’m doing good in school and stuff. When he was my age, he was always in trouble, drinking, smoking, having sex. It’s like, what the hell? (laughing) I mean, what the heck? I don’t do any of that stuff. So, I’m frickin’ awesome! (laughing)

In this example, Victoria offers an assessment of her own social behavior and academic progress. In talking about “doing good in school and stuff” she cites the differences between she and her father, much like the Anna and Maria did in contrasting their good student identities in light of their brothers’ poor behavior (Jenkins, 2008).
Victoria’s comparison also serves to demonstrate how she associates good girl with good student.

General AVID Latinas also exhibited their understanding of good students as those that dress “nice,” choosing to wear subtle (thin line) black eyeliner, curling or putting up their hair, and wearing colorful, patterned clothing. They showed off their gold or silver jewelry when comparing pieces with their friends and often let out loud, Spanish “Ay!” when impressed by a peer’s article of clothing or accessory. However, the girls passionately defended their decisions to dress this way by stating that “looking nice” (Victoria) and dressing “decent” (Anna) were ways to show that “you care about yourself and that you want to be professional” (Maria).

While General AVID Latinas were proud of taking the time to look good at school, they were careful to not be mistaken for the types of girls their parents had referred to as “getting attention.” For example, when Maria offered her description of dressing appropriately for school, she used the term “show-everything” and stated that it was what her father said when he referred to girls who dressed inappropriately. She elaborated by stating,

Well, yeah, like, my dad says that when girls show everything they are looking for guys to see them… notice them. Then, when they do, they get all ‘voladas’ [conceited] and they get into trouble. Like, I’m not looking for that. I just want to look decent and nice to come to school, you know. It is respectful to look like professional and nice when you go somewhere, not like church-nice, but, you know. (Personal communication, March 2013)

Victoria had her own description of her classmates’ attire:

I have my own style. It’s not like I look at this girl or that girl and say, ‘I want to look like her.’ Most of the time, I think, Yuck! I don’t want to look like her. Like, not to be mean, but there are some girls here that, ooohhh, you’d think that they
were in a rap video or something! (laughs) I mean, I wear like kind-of tight pants sometimes and big, hoop earrings, and stuff, but I ain’t showing what they’re showing and boys aren’t seeing my stuff.

Rose: What are they showing?

Victoria: Mrs. Pike, come on! You know what I mean. (Personal communication, May 2013)

Victoria laughed and then stalled when I asked her to elaborate and due to time constraints, we were not able to finish this conversation, but from my observations of Victoria and her General AVID Latina peers, I could surmise that she meant that girls that wore clothing that accentuated their bodies were intentionally accentuating their sexuality to get the attention of boys. It is most likely that Victoria came to draw this parallel based on her interpretation of her parents’ descriptions of good girls. Because of this, she clearly opposed such a practice and was aware of the self-imposed limits of the tight-ness of her clothes and the showing of her “stuff.”

In dressing appropriately, General AVID Latinas, again, performed good student because it was inextricably tied with good behavior, which meant being at school for the sake of doing well in school, not for the sake of getting attention from boys.

Future-oriented Good Girls

As good students, General AVID Latinas were also future oriented like their Honors AVID counterparts. However, General AVID Latinas’ future orientation focused on graduating from high school, attending college or vocational schools, getting married, and becoming mothers, in that order. In contrast to academically future oriented Honors AVID Latinas who were very clear about attending universities and considered the possibility of getting married and having children after securing their careers, General
AVID Latinas looked forward to taking enough coursework to secure good jobs, not necessarily good careers. To these girls work, that paid well and offered stability, would suffice. Marriage and children were not mere considerations; they were undeniably part of their imagined futures. However, General AVID Latinas were aware of the financial and emotional consequences of unplanned pregnancies and broken marriages. Their parents had shared their own experiences related to this and how they had affected the family as a whole. It is because of this, girls were hopeful that they would follow the correct “order” of marriage first, children second. Graduating from high school, possibly attending college or a vocational school, and getting a good paying job would not be attainable without decent grades, thus the motivation for passing classes.

General AVID Latinas held their parents’ homilies in high regard as evidenced by their references to them throughout the course of the study. Placing them at the forefront of their minds, these talks with their parents affected how they understood and performed good student. In this example, Maria explains her parents’ aspirations for her future:

Well, basically, they just want, like, they want us girls to not get into trouble. You know, get pregnant and stuff. Like, once you get pregnant, things get so much harder, and like, they just want us to not do those same mistakes. You know, because they already did. Like, my parents, they want me to graduate, go to school enough so I can get the job I want since I want to be a chef. That way I will have enough money to live on by myself, but I would always help my parents because I know my brothers won’t. You know? If I get decent grades, like C and above, I could be a chef. There’s a school in Lakeside (pseudonym) where I can learn how to be a chef. I like it and it will pay good. Then I can get married and have kids. (May 2013)

As a good student, Maria looked forward to meeting parents’ expectations of graduating high school and getting “enough” schooling for the job she desires, all before getting
married and having children. Because they were preparing for better future lives than their parents and brothers, Maria and her General AVID Latina peers appeared to find these expectations as reasonable requisites to reach their future aspirations. From their perspectives, then, part of being a good student included meeting these expectations.

Performing good student by doing well in school was also an indicator of future orientation. Through being good students, General AVID Latinas, like Honors AVID Latinas, oriented towards securing future stable independence. The identity constructs of good girl and good student (which includes AVID student and college-bound student) then, were crucial to the girls’ negotiation of these identities that they perceived would ultimately lead them to attaining their future goals of stable independence in which they would no longer have to rely on their parents, and instead, help them.

While they wanted to attend college in order to prepare for the jobs that would get them to the independence they desired, the importance they placed on working to make a living eclipsed specific plans for attending college, earning degrees, and choosing a career. The lack of specificity in terms of orientation towards college and career goals left General AVID Latinas focused on getting out of their current economic reality, struggling for money, as Victoria mentioned.

In her initial interview, Anna spoke about her plans to attend college and help her struggling parents.

Anna: Well, they tell me like, do I see how our life is now, we struggle a lot with money, because my dad doesn’t get paid enough for the bills. So my mom has to, like stretch it. So, right now I already know that I want to go to college. I’m already thinking, “Be smart.” … I want to be done in like two years so I can start working and making money. I don’t want to be stuck in school for a long time.
Rose: What do your parents expect you to do with your future?

Anna: They feel like I should be the one to show them [brothers] how it should be like, so they are kind of hoping I go and, well, because I’m already telling them when I get older I don’t want them to be like, “Oh, I have to feed her.” I want to be like, “I want to feed my parents.” I don’t want them to be like, “Oh, I don’t have enough food for all three of us.” I want to be, like, be the one taking care of them not them taking care of me…Because right now, my parents, they’ll take care of my brothers.

Rose: All of them?

Anna: Yes. They all live with me.

Rose: And you don’t think that’s a good idea?

Anna: No, I don’t see why they are still living with us. They don’t pay rent. They don’t do anything, like all they do is work. They get exactly the same money as my dad and they don’t give my mom a dime.

While Anna recognizes that she will need post high school education to obtain a job that gets her to stable independence, Anna’s main concern is finishing quickly so she can “start working and make money” and not be “stuck in school for a long time.”

Furthermore, Anna echoes the sentiments of Maria and Victoria who also want to graduate from high school, expedite their college or trade school coursework, and get a job which would afford them independence and the ability to help their struggling families.

In her initial interview, Maria stated she wanted to go to a nearby culinary school and get a job as a chef as soon as she finished her courses, while Victoria (in her initial interview) said she might be interested in veterinary medicine, but “they go to school way more than a nurse for babies”, so she considered the latter a better option (January 2013). Victoria justified her decision as follows,
I don’t know. I want to go to college, too, but I also want to have a life, you know, like have kids and stuff. I mean, we go to school forever. Since, we’re like, 5? I want to make my own money and be, like, independent and stuff. Then, when I have kids, I can get them the things they need and not have to struggle, you know? I’ll go to college, I think, but I want to work at a good job and have my little family. (laughter) (April 2013)

Unlike Honors AVID Latinas that looked to futures as university graduates and career women, General AVID girls set goals of graduating high-school, perhaps attending a local college and securing get a well-paying job that would afford them enough money and provisions to provide for their families and aging parents. Marriage and children were not necessarily considered an obstacle to reaching their goals, as they were for Honors AVID Latinas, as long as marriages and pregnancies took place after they graduated from high school.

During a group interview, Victoria, further expressed her views about marriage and family when the group was asked if marriage and children posed a threat to achieving their career goals:

I think that’s only for young mothers. If you’re, like me, I want to go to college and travel and stuff, before I have kids because those are my goals. You know, with like my mom, she had me when she was 16, 17, and she wanted to be a doctor and stuff and she couldn’t, because when you have a kid that’s hard. So, I think you can still establish your goals and become a mother and a wife but, when you’re older, if you want to have kids when you’re young then that, yeah, it will stop you from your goals. Yeah. (Victoria, May 2013)

In this same interview, Maria added,

… um, you could choose anything actually. Cause um, my mom, says, she always says, ‘Oh, I crossed 12 borders for you, so you could go to school. So, you can still be a mom, but, like, if you finish school first. That’s what I think. (May, 2013)
Anna contributed the following:

Yeah, well, I think the same thing. I mean, women do it all the time. Yeah, it’s harder with kids, but you can still go to school or work, but it is hard. I wouldn’t want to do it, because it’s a lot. So, like, my parents, they say, finish school, like graduate from ‘secundaria’ [high school] and start working because if you have kids first, you’ll get stuck in a job you hate and that sucks. You know, don’t end up with kids and the not be able to feed them yourself because you got fired or stopped working because you hated your job.

General AVID Latinas were clearly future-oriented in terms of working to graduate from high school, obtaining good jobs, and having families of their own. They looked towards doing things in the right order; graduating from high school, getting good jobs, and contributing to their families. General AVID Latinas perceived themselves as good, college- or trade school-bound students working toward their goals of expediting college, obtaining good paying jobs, marrying, and becoming independent working mothers, while Honors AVID Latinas imagined themselves as serious, college-bound students working to become educated professional women. Since they perceived stability in terms of maintaining good jobs that would allow them to assist their parents financially so that they would no longer struggle for money, they were specific about finishing high school unlike their “drop-out” siblings who relied on their parents as financial safety nets. They make sense of their actions as good students in terms of their future goals, not compromising what they wanted, but designing a plan with the necessary steps to meet those goals; high school, possibly college, job, marriage and family. Like Honors AVID Latinas, General AVID Latinas also recognized that the choices they made at this point in their lives had implications for the future, thus their orientation towards a future stable independence earned via education first, family
second. This finding may seem contradictory to the research in which familial ties dictate Latinas’ future plans (Valdés, 1997), however, as described above, General AVID Latinas held their parents homilies in high regard and placed them at the forefront of their minds when performing good student. Similar to the conversations that Honors AVID Latinas had with their parents involving implicit lessons about sexuality, racism, and educación (Ayala, 2006; Gallegos- Castillo, 2006; Hyams, 2006; and Valdés, 1996). General AVID Latinas referenced these consejos throughout the course of the study, using them as a means to make sense of their intentional negotiations as good students.

Parents Recognize Good Girls

Although General AVID Latinas performed as good students, parents and teachers recognized General AVID Latinas’ performances as that of good girls. As detailed above, recognition of General AVID Latinas’ identity work (Barton et al, 2013) was crucial to how General AVID Latinas imagined their present and future selves. It was their parents’ recognition of them as good girls that they interpreted as requirements of good students.

Like Valdes’ (1996) mothers, General AVID Latina mothers had invested much time into teaching their daughters how to be good girls. General AVID Latinas’ parents recognized their daughters’ willingness to help with chores at home and examples of good behavior in school and out of school as marks of good girls. Parents referred to their daughters not as good students, but as “good girls”. In doing so, they stressed their own priorities for their daughters; “go to school and be a good girl” rather than go to school and be a good student. Parents did want their daughters to pass all of their classes,
as they understood this as doing well in school, but wanted them to be recognized as well-behaved, good girls above all.

**Domestic Helpers**

General AVID Latina parents saw future value in their daughters learning how to carry out household tasks that proved they could take care of their families. In describing their daughters, all General AVID mothers talked about how the girls helped around the house (cooking, cleaning, caring for siblings) and made statements like, “Primero me ayuda con la cena y recoger los trastes y luego se pone ha hacer la tarea” [First she helps me with dinner and clearing the table and then she does her homework] (Anna’s mother, June 2013). Maria’s mother stated,

Ella tiene cosas que hacer en la casa para que sepa como hacer las cosas bien, ya que uno no va estar siempre con ellos, verdad? Ella me ayuda mucho porque siempre hay mucho que hacer. Pues, yo creo que también es importante que la niña sepa como cuidarse también.

[She has chores to do at home so that she can know how to do things right, seeing as how one can’t always be with them, right? She helps me a lot around the house because there is always a lot of housework to do. Well, I think it is also important for her to know how to take care of herself also] (June 2013).

For General AVID parents, participating in household chores was part of preparing for future roles as wives and mothers, taking care of their families and themselves. After school, their good girls arrived home in time to help tidy the house or help run errands before helping to prepare for dinner. For example, in her interview, Anna’s mother explained Anna’s routine when she got home from school,

Ella se tarda como media hora para llegar de la escuela y luego la pongo ha limpiar algo, o vamos a comprar mandado, o hacemos de comer. Como le digo, ella me ayuda mucho porque hay mucho que hacer. Se porta bien.
[She takes about half an hour to get home from school and then I have her clean something, or we go grocery shopping, or we cook. Like I said, she helps me because there is always housework to do. She’s a good girl.] (Personal communication, June 2013).

Anna’s mother ends this statement with, “She is a good girl,” an indication that being a good girl meant performing housework. This sentiment is echoed by the remaining General AVID parents that made sure the girls knew how to cook and keep house in the absence of their mothers. Chores included cooking and cleaning for their fathers and siblings. Maria’s mother stated,

Ella tiene que saber como limpiar la casa y como cocinar cuando yo no este. También tiene que ir a la escuela y portarse bien, pero no puede crecer y no saber como darle de comer a su familia.

[She has to know how to keep a house clean and how to cook when I am gone. She also has to go to school and be a good girl, but she can’t grow up and not know how to feed her family.] (Personal communication, June 2013)

These young women were expected to contribute to the household economy by doing their part with household tasks. While some research indicates that this type of contribution to the family tends to go unappreciated (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006), General AVID Latina parents recognize their daughters’ contributions in the form of household chores as evidence of their good-girlness.

Because parents privileged good behavior over academics, they did not invest in getting to know what their daughters needed in order to do well in school. Unlike Honors AVID Latina parents that provided transportation to and from academically - oriented activities and provided study time by not charging their daughters with household chores, General AVID Latina parents did not make it a point to provide a time and a place for
their daughters to work on academic assignments. They did expect, however, that their daughters would go on to graduate from high school, a mainstream American requisite for obtaining employment (Valdés, 1996). Furthermore, General AVID Latina parents were markedly unaware of when or if their daughters completed their homework as indicated by Maria’s mother when I asked if her daughter had a routine for getting schoolwork done at home, “Pues, yo creo que si hace la tarea. Nadie me habla para quejarse. Se ha de portar bien.” [I am sure she does it. No one calls me to complain. She must be a good girl]. In this interview excerpt, it is clear that Maria mother blurs the lines between academic work and good behavior. She does not know if Maria completes her homework and assumes she must since the school has not made her aware of anything different. With that, she recognizes her daughter as a good girl and demonstrates the value of good girl versus good student.

In another example of good girl recognition, when I asked parents to tell me what they knew about their daughters’ classes and related homework, all General AVID parents revealed that they did not know much about their daughters’ courses, but, again, that they were good girls at school. For example, Victoria’s mother said,

Voy a ser honesta. No se mucho sobre las clases de [Victoria]. Ya ve que la escuela aquí es muy diferente de lo que nosotros teníamos en nuestro país. Mientras no se saque malas calificaciones y se porte bien³, no me preocupo.

³ porte bien, portarse bien, porta bien- These conjugations of portar, to behave, translate into behave well and behave him/herself, however, it has been my personal and professional experience that when Latino parents make this statement, they are referring to their children being “good” boys or “good” girls. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the conjugations of portar bien, will be translated as being a good girl.
[I’m going to be honest. I don’t know much about [Victoria’s] classes. You know
that school here is very different from what we had in our country. As long as she
doesn’t earn bad grades and she’s a good girl, I don’t worry] (June 2013).

This statement from Victoria’s mother is telling of the little knowledge that General
AVID parents had about their daughters’ coursework and academic demands and what it
took to be recognized as a good student. However, this example also highlights parents’
understanding of “good girl” and the importance placed on good girl behavior.

Parents also reported that, throughout any given day, various family members
(male siblings and their friends and girlfriends, as well as aunts and cousins) stopped in to
visit, making for a busy household and ongoing chores. These “floating populations”
(Valdés, 1996) affected the time and space in which General AVID Latinas were able to
get their school work done, still, parents expected that their daughters would somehow
reconcile this.

In recognizing their daughters as good girls, General AVID Latina parents sought
to manage this recognition with what they could control. Their daughters’ time outside
of school was spent on attending to familial responsibilities including chores, errands,
and socializing.

Good Behavior

General AVID Latina parents believed that their daughters were well behaved not
only because they helped around the house, but also because they believed their
daughters completed their school assignments and they did not receive negative reports
from the school. However, parents had their share of trouble with their sons, which
served to highlight their daughters’ good behavior, in comparison. In voicing her
embarrassment over her son’s poor behavior and her appreciation for her daughter’s good behavior, Maria’s mother stated,

Da mucha vergüenza cuando habla la maestra para decir que mis hijos no se han portado bien o que no están haciendo sus tareas. Ya no están chiquitos. Saben como portarse bien. Gracias a Dios, no me ha sucedido lo mismo con mi hija. Ella sí se ha portado muy bien.

[It is very embarrassing when a teacher calls to tell you that your child is behaving badly or that they are not getting their work done. They are not little anymore. They know how to be good. Thank God the same hasn’t happened with my daughter. She has been very good.] (Personal communication, June 2013).

Maria’s mother’s words are telling of one way in which parents came to recognize their daughters as good girls, by comparing their sons’ poor behavior and lack of academic achievement to their daughters’ good behavior and passing grades. The use of the word vergüenza, meaning shame or shameful, is especially significant in describing the contrast between their sons and daughters which, again, serves to emphasize the behaviors associated with recognition of good girl (Jenkins, 2008). Similarly, girls spoke of their self-perceptions in comparison with their brothers’ behavior. In a group interview, it became clear that parents’ recognition of good girls was bittersweet for all of the girls. In regards to their daughters, parents had focused on keeping them out of trouble (dropping out of school, sex, drugs), but this did not seem to be the same parenting strategy that they employed for their sons. This double standard was frustrating for General AVID Latinas. Maria was simply disillusioned:

My brothers have gotten in big trouble at school with bad grades and everything and they still get to go to quinces⁴ and come home at like 1 or 2 in the morning.

⁴ The term “quinces” is short for quinceañeras, a coming-of-age celebration much like a sweet sixteen.
My dad just gets mad for like a day and then gets over it. My mom gets really mad, but still nothing happens to them. They even bought him, like, three pairs of shoes one time after coming home really late. I hate it! They know I’m, like better than them, you know, good, but (pause followed by sigh), it sucks. You know? (Personal communication, February 2013)

In the same group interview, Anna added that male siblings were treated differently because “…they’re boys, they can do anything” (Anna, March 2013). “I guess it’s because they aren’t the ones who can get pregnant,” Victoria added (March 2013).

The girls’ points above underscore the importance parents placed on what they recognized as good girl behavior and how gender played a part in that recognition. Although it is unclear exactly how General AVID Latina parents perceived their sons’ behaviors, it is clear however, that male privilege may have been a parenting strategy employed to keep their daughters safe and tacitly served to help parents maintain their recognition of their daughters as good girls (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006). The contrast between the girls’ and their male siblings’ academic achievement and behavior was fundamental in the girls’ understanding of and performances as good students, as well as in the recognition of these girls as good girls.

**Good Girls Become Good Women- Future Orientation**

In sharing their immigrant stories with their daughters, General AVID parents conveyed their future orientations for good girls. This was evident when speaking with General AVID Latinas. The girls often quoted their parents in Spanish, stating that they wanted the girls to have better lives than they did, free of drugs, alcohol, and teenage pregnancies. In the following excerpt from one of my conversations with Maria, she
quoted her father when telling me about what her parents expected from her in terms of schooling:

Maria: My dad, he says, um, you know, like, ‘Ay que ser muy trucha’ [‘You have to be very street-wise’] because, you know, on the street, someone can trick you into doing bad stuff and then, like, you ruin your life. Like, he has seen so many people get addicted to drugs and stuff. He wants me to know how bad it is.

Rose: So, how will you avoid making those mistakes?

Maria: Um, well, by doing good in school and stuff. You know, like getting a good job and stuff, because, like, if you get your mind on things that are good and right, then you won’t go the wrong way. My mom says, I didn’t cross 12 borders for you to not get an education and end up ruining your life.”

Maria makes sense of her father’s advice and her mother’s sacrifice as signs that she should be a good student and do well in school. Parents were concerned that their daughters would prioritize attractiveness and romance over education (graduating from college) and future independence. Their concern was valid and has played out in previous research such as that of Holland and Eisenhart (1990) in which college women’s aspirations diminished over time due to their growing involvement in romantic relationships, in which ultimately their goals gave way to those of their spouses and/or the demands of family.

Parents’ focus on their daughters’ social behavior over academic was evident as they conveyed their desires for their daughters’ futures. Victoria’s mother, for example, hoped that Victoria would secure a job that Victoria loved so she would not have to deal with going to a job she hated (June 2013). Anna’s mother stated,

Pues, nosotros queremos que tenga un futuro seguro, ya que uno batalla tanto porque no pudo estudiar. Así que queremos que termine la escuela y que se busque un buen trabajo.
[Well, we want her to have a secure future, since one struggles so much because one couldn’t get an education. So, we want her to finish school and to look for a good job] (June 2013).

Getting an education and not ruining her life meant going to school, not getting pregnant before graduating or before marriage. Being in school meant not being on the streets and not being involved in romantic relationships. The only activities these girls really had time for involved attending school and attending to their families and extended families. Doing so meant that good girls were working towards the futures their parents imagined, in which daughters finished high school followed by obtaining a good job.

**Teachers’ Recognize Good Girls, Good Students**

Teachers’ perceptions of these Latinas as good girls helped them to maintain a social identity that was in line with what their parents hoped for; girls that behaved well in school and did not engage in sexual relationships before marriage. The teachers’ discourse surrounding General AVID Latina students included terms such as “nice girls”, “quiet”, “distracted by boys”, and “they try hard” (General AVID teachers, February 2013). The discourse used to describe General AVID parents consisted of “never show up to anything”, “too busy working to worry about their kids’ grades” (General AVID teacher, December 2012). Teachers used this discourse to provide possible explanations for why General AVID Latinas were mediocre students who had the potential to exceed academically, but were held back by lack of parental involvement and motivation. Their observations of being “good girls” who “try hard” were based on the fact that the girls were quiet, cordial, and did not get into trouble on campus.
Academic expectations for General AVID Latinas and their general education peers were lower than for Honors students. For example, General AVID classroom environments were less rigorous and, seemingly, had more discipline issues than Honors AVID classes and quiet students were perceived as “good students.” The fact that they were passing their classes with C’s also made them “good students.” In his initial interview, the General Science teacher described the good girls in his class.

Rose: How would you describe Anna?

General Science Teacher: Um, she does alright in here. She’s an AVID kid. So, she’s learning the organizational skills, neat work. Maturity level is higher than her peers. I mean, she dresses like a woman, not like a trashy woman, but like she’s going to work.

Rose: How does she behave in class?

General Science Teacher: The girls tend to be quiet about their intelligence. As far as actual ability, I find that Hispanic females tend to be either higher level or lower level, there’s less of them in the middle. She’s one that’s in the middle. Um, she participates. She’s a social butterfly as well, so that distracts from it. Um, as far as intelligence wise, she’s about average intelligence. She could be doing better if she applied herself more, but she applies herself well enough to pass her class. Um, I don’t know if she got higher than a C, but she is about a C student. (Personal communication, December 2012)

Here, the teacher recognizes Anna as a good girl versus good student. He justifies his perception of her by stating that she socially motivated and a C-student. In describing her dress, he recognizes Anna’s good student performance (dressing “nice” and “professional”) as a symbol of her maturity and her involvement in the AVID program. He describes Victoria with the following:

General Science Teacher: Victoria is actually performing slightly below her ability. She’s an AVID student and I would say that her neatness, organization is high. Her comprehension and understanding is proficient, but she tends to hang
out with the boys and goof off with them and the period that she’s in, the 4th period, there’s a lot of goofing off boys in here. Um, so she’s a C-B student, she should be an A student. (Personal communication, December 2012)

Here the teacher attributes Victoria’s inattentiveness to her attention on boys. It is interesting to note here that during the course of the study, Victoria attributed her off-task behavior to the teacher’s inability or unwillingness to provide succinct explanations for course content, which, for her, made the class “boring.” For Victoria, the desire to socialize stemmed from the teacher’s inability to teach in a way that was engaging for students. His recognition of her as a “C-B student” who demonstrates care for her work with neatness and organization are descriptors of a good student, who could do better, but is passing nonetheless.

The teacher’s description of Maria is quite different:

General Science Teacher: Well, Low. Low. She’s low. She’s usually pretty quiet. She does usually about 50-50% of her work, so if she did more work she’d have a better grade. She does enough to pass.

Rose: So do you think that it is because if she’s not doing her work she’s not understanding and if she’s not understanding then she’s not doing her work?

General Science Teacher: More so than intellectual ability. If she put in more effort she’d do better…Um, she’s distracted, quiet usually, she’s usually not a behavior issue, but she’s probably borderline basic, maybe proficient understanding. If she put in more work she’d be proficient, but I’d say she’s probably basic, depending on the class, like math she’d probably be below basic.

Maria may be “Low. Low. Low” according to this teacher, but she is also passing this his class, which validates her performance as a good student. However, this general science teacher appears to assess the girls’ academic standing in his class based on his perception
of their intellectual potential and the effort they put forth (Tournaki, 2003; Van Duzer, 2006; Tiedemann, 2002; Jones and Myhill, 2004).

When offering his final comment regarding General AVID Latina students, the General Science Teacher offers a telling remark regarding his overall perception of the girls:

I think overall, the girls in you’re interested are pretty good students and really good girls. They are all quiet, sweet, and behave well, even if they struggle a bit, that’s ok. When they get it, it seems to stick and that is all I can hope for.

(Personal communication, December 2012)

Here it is clear that, like parents, teachers value the behaviors of good girls over those associated with good students as evidenced by his description of their “quiet, sweet” behavior and the adjective “really” to emphasize “good girls.” Furthermore, the teacher admits that struggling academically is acceptable. This narrative suggests that the teacher not only privileges good behavior over academic achievement, but also that being a good girl facilitates recognition as good student and that good student is predicated by good girl.

What the teacher fails to say in his descriptions of General AVID Latinas is that, compared to the expectations in honors courses, the general education courses stress that students pass their classes, as does the AVID course in which general education, AVID students are enrolled. For General AVID Latinas and their general education peers, there

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5 Interestingly, Victoria’s science teacher also interpreted her behavior as stifling her actual academic ability as higher than what she portrayed in the classroom. Furthermore, in the last group interview, Victoria stated that her English teacher wanted to recommend her for 9th grade Honors AVID English but she said she declined stating that she did not feel that she could handle Honors AVID English along with all the demands of being a freshman (May 2013).
is no incentive for putting forth the effort needed to earn A’s and B’s when C-grades suffice. Thus, earning passing grades was a driving force for General AVID girls to do well enough to maintain their social identities at home and school.

**Summary**

For these girls, their interpretations of good student meant doing well in school, being well behaved, and being future oriented. Their parents and teachers, however, privileged social behavior over academics and, therefore, recognized the girls’ enactments of good student as good girl performances.

General AVID Latinas’ performances as good students and good girls who did well in school and behaved well in and out of school resembled the Mexican concept of *educación* (Valdés, 1996) in which the girls behaved in the respectful manner that they had been taught at home. Given that their families had faced financial difficulties and behavioral challenges with male siblings, General AVID Latinas behaved in such a way as to demonstrate the lessons they have learned via *educación*, being good girls who were domestic helpers first, students second.

In contrast to Honors AVID Latinas who performed serious student identities and were recognized as such, the relationship between General AVID Latinas’ performances and recognition was much more complex. General AVID Latinas’ performances, based on their interpretation of good students, were recognized as good girls. Specifically, the girls performed good students that behaved well (good girls) and were recognized as good girls that passed their classes (good students). The complexity of this relationship sets the stage for the negotiation of a dual-identity in which the girls perform just well
enough, academically, to maintain good student status while quietly pushing the boundaries of good behavior (e.g., texting in class, chewing gum, copying homework) that gains them the recognition of good girls. It is this intentional negotiation that distinguishes General AVID Latinas from Honors AVID Latinas and mediates the differential achievement between the two groups of girls.
CHAPTER VI: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Major Findings

Because identity is a complex construct, Gee’s (2000) four perspectives for “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’” (p. 99) and Jenkins’ (2008) perspectives for analyzing interactions between and among groups of individuals were useful in explaining the performance and recognition of the identities that came to describe Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas’ differential achievement. 8th grade Latina students in both Honors AVID and General AVID courses exercised agency within the context of the school and home where they performed in ways that led to recognition as certain types of people as Gee suggested and the similarities and contrasts between the two groups of girls worked to identify the social identities by which they were recognized.

Specifically, I found that Honors AVID Latinas and General AVID Latinas achieved differently due to enacted behaviors and recognition of those behaviors. For example, Honors AVID Latinas performed behaviors associated with recognition as serious students. For Honors AVID Latinas, serious student meant being present and future goal-oriented. How parents, teachers, and peers recognized Honors AVID Latinas as serious students hinged on the work involved in maintaining this social identity.

Part of parents’, teachers’, and peers’ recognition of Honors AVID Latinas as a serious student involved the girls’ purposeful enactment and practice of certain academic traits aligned with their future roles as college students and career women. Honors AVID Latinas were goal-oriented with college in mind and strategically planned the employment of strategies that were conducive to prioritizing academic achievement.
Specifically, I found that these students’ parents provided a support system in which they afforded their daughters uninterrupted study time, transportation to extra-curricular events, and a home environment free of domestic responsibilities that may have otherwise interfered with academic study or homework time.

I also discovered Honors AVID Latinas planning for their roles as successful college students by applying AVID skills and strategies in their daily experiences in middle school, such as taking and studying notes, organizing their binders to facilitate accessing necessary classroom materials in a timely manner, and engaging in content-related and college-related discussions. Teachers recognized these efforts as signs of serious students. These girls worked toward a clear path to university attendance and enjoyable, stable careers as independent career women.

Honors AVID Latinas also maintained mutually supportive peer networks with other serious students. Burke and Stets (2009) state, “The greater the number of persons to whom one is connected through having a particular identity, the greater is the commitment to that identity” (p. 47). Furthermore, the level of commitment to an identity affects that identity’ saliency in given contexts. In the case of Honors AVID Latinas at Eagle Mountain, through the process of tracking and AVID program acceptance, they were connected to other Honors and AVID students in their daily lives as middle school students. Their social networks supported their identities in that being serious students was their most salient social identity across contexts; from school to home.
Similarly, General AVID Latinas’ general education track and enrollment in AVID served to promote their commitment to good student performances and good girl recognition. For these girls, their interpretations of good student influenced their performances. This meant doing well in school, being well behaved, and being future oriented. Their parents and teachers, however, privileged social behavior over academics and, therefore, recognized General AVID Latinas’ enactments of good student as good girl performances.

General AVID Latina parents and teachers recognized their girls as good girls. Parents recognition of their daughters as good girls was based on the notion that they were good, reliable domestic helpers, passed their classes, and to their knowledge, did not get negative attention from teachers. Similarly, the students’ teachers recognized the girls as good girls first, good students second because they were quiet, nice girls that managed to learn some content and pass their classes.

For General AVID Latinas, doing their schoolwork to earn passing grades while acquiring the necessary skills and information to apply for college was a just the right amount of academics to balance out the demands of familial and social expectations. When compared to Honors AVID Latinas, these students were not as specific about which colleges, universities, or trade schools they wanted to attend, nor did they have plans for experiences that would enrich their schooling experiences or that would serve to improve the likelihood of earning scholarships or college admission.

General AVID Latinas looked forward to some college and a good paying job to help support their future families while not relying on their parents for financial support.
They did not foresee moving very far from their parents as they hoped to secure jobs that would allow them to help their parents financially. General AVID Latinas considered themselves “college-bound” since they were also AVID students, but when talking about the future, General AVID Latinas spoke about getting married, having children, and holding down jobs that would gross enough to pay their bills and afford them some luxuries such as eating out, shopping, and taking family vacations to visit family within the United States and Mexico. Unlike Honors AVID Latina students, General AVID Latinas did not see getting married and having children as deterrents to achieving their future goals. During a group interview, Victoria, an 8th grade General AVID Latina expressed her views about marriage and family when the group was asked if marriage and children posed a threat to achieving their career goals:

I think that’s only for young mothers. If you’re, like me, I want to go to college and travel and stuff, before I have kids because those are my goals. You know, with like my mom, she had me when she was 16, 17, and she wanted to be a doctor and stuff and she couldn’t, because when you have a kid that’s hard. So, I think you can still establish your goals and become a mother and a wife but, when you’re older, if you want to have kids when you’re young then that, yeah, it will stop you from your goals. Yeah. (Personal communication, May 2013)

In this same interview, Maria, also a General AVID Latina added,

… um, you could choose anything actually. Cause um, my mom, says, she always says, ‘Oh, I crossed 12 borders for you, so you could go to school. So, you can still be a mom, like, if you finish school first. That’s what I think. (Personal communication, May 2013)

These statements are telling of the motivation girls have for being good students, working toward graduating from high school, taking college courses to meet the requirements to get a good paying job, and then becoming working mothers. They make
sense of their actions to be recognized as good girls and good students in terms of their future goals, not compromising what they want, but designing a plan with the necessary steps to meet those goals.

General AVID Latinas worked on meeting the ultimate expectations of them, what Hyams’ called the “formula for success”, graduating from high-school and not getting pregnant (p. 102). They looked towards doing things in the right order. While these girls recognized that they would need post high school education to obtain a job that allowed for stable independence, their main concern was expediting their college or trade school coursework and then getting jobs which would afford them independence and the ability to help their struggling families. In doing so, the girls were preparing for, and being prepared for, a class future different than that for which the Honors AVID Latinas prepared.

Honors AVID Latinas resembled Bettie’s (2003) working-class Mexican American girls that had to work hard to “pass” as middle-class by enacting certain behaviors that would be recognized as middle-class so that they could be afforded access to institutional opportunities that they otherwise may not have accessed. Bettie (2003) suggests that Mexican-American girls might be pressured to sacrifice their racial identity by subscribing to a pro-academic identity, Mexican-American girls would not be vulnerable to vocational track placement if they were extraordinarily “good” academically, performed the school-sanctioned ideal of femininity (that is synonymous with being White and middle-class), and made no mistakes along the way (p. 162). While Honors AVID Latinas in my study did not appear to make such a sacrifice (they
embraced and made the most of their bilingualism), they did appear to acquiesce to the mainstream, White, middle-class style of dress including wearing little to no make-up. Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that they were extraordinary students, often outperforming their Honors AVID counterparts by earning over 100% in their Honors Physical Science class. Although I did not gather evidence of their academic achievement in years past, the girls did reveal that they had been in AVID and the honors track due to standardized test scores since sixth grade. Therefore, they had not fallen victim to the vocational track that Bettie warned of and were well on their way to enrolling in college-prep courses and the high school AVID program, continuing their paths toward ivy-league and career goals, which, if met, will likely yield a future in the middle-class.

On the other hand, General AVID Latinas at Eagle Mountain Middle School were not only subjected to general education tracking in their core courses, but were then tracked a second time when they were placed in an AVID classroom with other general education students and no Honors students. Because of this practice, these students were unable to appropriation of necessary social capital that allow students to negotiate schooling experiences that support academic achievement (Valenzuela, 1999). Specifically, because General AVID Latinas rarely interacted with students in the Honors track, they participated in different classroom experiences than their Honors AVID counterparts. This, in turn, left General AVID Latinas in classrooms with teachers that privileged behavior over academics, offering less rigorous coursework. Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that these students received less in-depth lessons on AVID
skills and strategies as well as less information about navigating the college application process than the honors track students. This rendered the General AVID Latinas at a disadvantage for setting present and future goals aligned with the purpose of AVID.

**Unexpected Findings**

Although the purpose of programs such as AVID is to untrack students, offering equal access to a rigorous curriculum and explicit instruction in skills and strategies that bridge the social and cultural capital gaps that will benefit students in preparing for future college attendance (Mehan et al, 1996), my study shows that tracking in core subjects (English, Math, and Science) at the middle school level was a deeply rooted institutional process that, nevertheless, limited the access to equally rigorous coursework and placed these students in contexts that aided the maintenance and promotion of certain social identities. Consistent with studies that show that minority students who are tracked by ability and attend secondary schools with high populations of minority students receive less intensive and less demanding courses, especially in mathematics and science than their White counterparts and have less access to rigorous curriculum, high quality instruction, and mathematics and science resources (Oakes, et al. 1990), the labs in which the Honors AVID Latinas and General AVID Latinas participated were markedly different.

In the Honors Physical Science class, the teacher assigned labs that required students to form a hypothesis, choose a lab partner, follow a procedure to conduct an experiment at a lab station complete with Bunsen burners, beakers, and other lab materials, and then document and illustrate their findings in a science journal.
In the General Physical Science class, the teacher assigned labs that were typically worksheets, diagrams, or small models that were completed in assigned table groups in which the General AVID girls spent a great deal of time with their heads down, looking around the class, or waiting for someone in the group to come up with the answers, after which they would look in the textbook to see if the answers appear reasonable or correct. This type of participation was neither reinforced nor denounced, therefore, these students continued to employ this strategy to complete their labs and maintain the recognitions of their institutional identities with little effort. Furthermore, the General Physical Science teacher privileged good behavior over academic achievement.

The institutional context of tracking influenced what AVID had become at this site and, therefore, influenced social identities and academic achievement. Clearly, the effect of tracking in core subjects spilled over into the scheduling of AVID classes and made it so Honors and General Education track students were in homogenous AVID classrooms. Therefore, Honors AVID and General AVID Latinas had different AVID experiences. This practice was contradictory to the original program design with the intended goal of “untracking” students (Mehan, et al., 1996) because it created different learning environments within these classrooms, which in turn affected the lessons delivered within each class. Essentially, students were still tracked even within the AVID program based on their Honors or General recognition. This type of “school within a school” (Conchas, 2006) design created a dichotomy in the depth and quality of AVID supports and strategies that students were exposed to, providing extensive supports to
Honors AVID students and moderate supports to General AVID students, and light supports to all General Education students.

The purpose of AVID is to level the playing field, so to speak, for first generation college attendees, which are typically underrepresented minorities. In the case of Eagle Mountain Middle School, it is clear that the AVID program did not truly serve as a means of untracking as evidenced by the Honors and General education students that participated in different schooling experiences that contributed to differential achievement.

Moreover, Honors AVID Latinas appeared to suffer from a form of imposter syndrome (Sherman, 2013). Sherman states that imposter syndrome “is most common among women leaders who feel they don’t deserve the success they’ve achieved despite external evidence of their competence” (p. 57). In the case of Honors AVID Latinas, this seemed to be the case. For example, Barbara (who received eight end of the year awards including 8th Grade Student of the Year stated, “I don’t think I am the best student or that I deserve so many awards. There are a lot of students who deserve them” (May 2013). In addition, Ericka who received Honorable Mention for her entry in a county-wide essay contest did not even attend the award ceremony, claiming, “I actually forgot about it. I’m really not the type of person who likes attention. I really don’t like awards ceremonies” (May, 2013). While these examples may be viewed through a lens of humility, they are more likely cases of imposter syndrome. Honors AVID Latinas worked, and worked hard. Evidence of them enjoying themselves as “typical” teenagers or socializing for the
sake of socializing, was non-existent. No matter how hard they worked and no matter how high they achieved, there was always more to do to get ahead.

For General AVID Latinas in this study, for whom “good enough” was the goal, the possibility exists that General AVID Latinas even in setting goals to follow the “right order” (graduate from high school, get good jobs, get married and have kids, and attain stable independence), they may fall short. Because their visions of future goals were not as clear as the envisioned futures of Honors AVID Latinas, General AVID Latinas run the risk of giving up on their goals like the women in Holland and Eisenhart’s (1990) study of minority college women whose future career goals were eventually eclipsed by marriage and children and their husband’s ambitions.

However, For General AVID Latinas, being “good girls” that are good enough is as much as problem as Honors AVID Latinas that are “serious students.” While good girls were valued for being quiet and well behaved, the serious students valued being humble and hard-working. In both cases, girls participated in their own possible marginalization; whether toward mediocre academic achievement that was simply “better than” or toward becoming a career women living a muted existence.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Because identity ultimately affects academic achievement, understanding how adolescent Latinas achieve varying levels of academic success serves to illuminate how schooling institutions can support underrepresented minority students. Further research with a focus on identity negotiation and recognition is needed to continue to uncover explanations for differential achievement among middle school Latinas and other
underrepresented minorities. Specifically, I call for research on interventions in place to support students in the general education track and their parents. Valdés (1996) and Lareau (1989) posit that parents’ lack of understanding of the way schools work placed minority and working-class children at a disadvantage. Heath (1986) further delineates this disadvantage through the explanation of linguistic and cultural mismatch. Parents cannot fully support the development of pro-academic institutional identities if they do not have an understanding of what it means to be a student in their communities’ schools and are not given the information needed to negotiate a balance between their world and the world of schooling. Therefore, research with a focus on support programs to facilitate minority students’ and their parents’ understanding of schooling in the U.S. would also yield valuable data to improve our understanding of how interventions help minority students and their parents bridge the gap between cultural mismatches affecting academic achievement.

It is also necessary to attend to the issue of the implementation of AVID at the middle school level and possibly implement interventions within AVID that provide support for students who take AVID courses, but are still subjected to tracking. My findings suggest that the version of AVID implemented at this site has deviated from the program’s initial purpose and this has resulted in General AVID Latinas performing just well enough to pass classes and setting goals that are not in line with the program goals of AVID. By investigating the possible evolution of the implementation of the AVID program, practitioners and administrators will also benefit from learning how to best meet the needs of diverse students for whom the program was intended. Professional
development for AVID teachers with a focus on cross cultural sensitivity and gender identity will likely provide teachers with the tools necessary to create classroom environments in which academic achievement and the learning and embracing of AVID skills, strategies, and goals are privileged over good behavior.

Investigations into the intersection of AVID goals and lessons and gendered identity are needed to uncover the inherent assumptions of the AVID program. Is the expectation that all who participate in the program will embrace its teachings, especially those that involve participating in class, engaging in discussions in which students inquire and ask clarifying questions? If so, how does the AVID program, and specifically AVID teachers, account for diversity? For Latina students like those in this study, doing so went against cultural notions of modesty and humility, although Honors AVID Latinas’ worked exceptionally hard to compensate for this. Therefore, gaining insight into the perspectives of underrepresented ethnic and gender minorities in the AVID program may shed some light as to how the program may better serve these populations.
REFERENCES


