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Entering The World Of University: The Literacies And Indentities Of Latino/a Youth In Their Transitions From High School To College

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ENTERING THE WORLD OF UNIVERSITY: THE LITERACIES AND
IDENTITIES OF LATINO/A YOUTH IN THEIR TRANSITIONS FROM
HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

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Doctoral Program in Teaching, Learning and Culture

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Dedication

To my family

ENTERING THE WORLD OF UNIVERSITY: THE LITERACIES AND
IDENTITIES OF LATINO/A YOUTH IN THEIR TRANSITIONS FROM
HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

by

LUCIENE SOARES WANDERMUREM, B.A., M.A.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

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Abstract

This year-long ethnographic case study seeks to contribute to the body of literature on minoritized students' transitions from high school to college by drawing on sociocultural theories of literacies and identities to examine seven bilingual Latino/a students' academic trajectories from the spring semester of their senior year in high school through the fall semester of their first year in college. Specifically, this study explores how Latino/a youth's identities and academic aspirations were shaped by literacy practices across spaces – out-of-school, at a high school, and in college classrooms – over the course of a year. The study was conducted in the U.S.-Mexico Southwest border region and involved three research sites: a high school, where college-bound participants were recruited; a community college and a four-year university, where the participants matriculated soon after graduating from high school. All of the participants were considered first-generation college students, that is, “students who are the first members of their immediate families to attend college” (Chen, 2005, p. iii).

The analysis of multiple data sources revealed that in the high school, bilingual youth had limited chances to draw on their everyday bilingual/bicultural literacy practices as resources to support their learning of academic literacies. The gap between in and out-of-school practices were also found in relation to expectations towards students' academic aspirations: in the space of home, Latino/a youth's academic aspirations were nurtured by their parents' expectations that they would become role models for their siblings by being the first in their families to attend college. In the space of the high school, however, the participants reported feeling that their teachers held very low expectations for them, which in turn, negatively affected their preparation for college-level coursework. In addition to these findings, the analysis of data collected during participants' first semester in college revealed that all of the students faced some sort of challenge regarding the acquisition of the academic literacies associated with college success –managing time wisely, taking notes during lectures, applying study

strategies, and understanding professors' expectations for exams and assignments are examples of their challenges. Even though these challenges partially relate to participants' poor academic preparation at the secondary level, they are also a consequence of structural factors as some of the participants struggled with balancing full-time jobs, school, and family responsibilities.

The findings of this study have implications for secondary and postsecondary-level policy and practice as well as for research and theory related to academic preparations and college readiness among minoritized students, particularly first-generation college students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Widening access to higher education has become a national priority in the past two decades (Barnes, Slate & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010; Chandler, Slate, Moore and Barnes, 2014). Given the fact that the number of ethnically and linguistically minoritized students, especially of Latino/a origin, has rapidly increased over the past decade to become the largest minority group in the U.S. (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011), broadening access to higher education has almost always been seen as the key to economic growth but less often as a matter of justice.

Understanding college access and completion as a matter of social justice, in this study I examine Latino/a students' transitions from high school to college. As the data from the Pew Research Center show (2015), the number of Latino/as, one of the fastest growing minoritized groups in the U.S., enrolled in postsecondary institutions has more than tripled since 1993 (Krogstad, 2015). College retention, however, remains a problem for these students. In 2013, only 15% of Latino/a youth ages 25-29 had a Bachelor's or higher degree. In contrast, about 40% of their White peers and 60% of their Asian peers had a bachelor's degree or higher (Krogstad, 2015).

Socioeconomic factors have been found to play a major role in Latino/a youth's decisions regarding pursuing a college degree, selecting a postsecondary institution, and obtaining a Bachelor's degree (Krogstad, 2015; Fry & Taylor, 2013). Latino/a youth, mainly from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are less likely than White youth to enroll in a four-year college, attend a selective college, be enrolled in college full time, and complete a bachelor's degree (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Inadequate academic preparation, which is also tied to low SES, has also been

identified as an issue hindering Latino/a as well as other ethnically and linguistically minoritized students throughout the K-16 pipeline (Salas, Portes, D'Amico, & Rios-Aguilar, 2011).

As a consequence of inadequate academic preparation in the public school system, ethnically minoritized students, particularly Latino/as, tend to be overrepresented in community colleges and in “remedial” classes, especially in the areas of math and English (Duncheon, 2015; Kibler, Bunch, & Endris, 2011; Salas et al., 2011).

In an attempt to address the inequalities in academic preparation in K-12 public schools, federal and state legislators have heavily relied on curriculum standardization and high-stakes testing (Barnes et al., 2010; Chandler, et al. 2014). Even though the underpinnings of standardization may be well-intentioned, researchers have argued that the current “one-size-fits all college readiness agenda” (Barnes et al., 2010) reproduces social inequalities (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Warren, Jenkins & Kulick, 2006). Warren et al. (2006) have found a relation between high school exit exams and lower high school completion rates among low income and ethnically minoritized students.

Barnes and colleagues (2010) go further into the issue of standardization by questioning the use of high-stakes tests such as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT) as indicators of college readiness. The authors argue that, although test scores are good predictors of academic preparedness, they do not necessarily indicate whether a student is “college-ready” or not. Barnes et al. (2010) go on to explain that academic preparedness is just one aspect of college readiness, a much broader concept that also relates to the social context of postsecondary institutions. College readiness, they say, involves the knowledge required to enter and succeed in higher education. College admission and financial aid processes, awareness of faculty

expectations, and “college-going attitudes” such as time management and study strategies are examples of what it means to be “college-ready” (Barnes et al., 2010). In this sense, a student may be considered academically prepared on the basis of standardized test scores but still may not succeed in college because of not having developed these other components of college readiness previously mentioned. In a nutshell, college transition and success are complex processes that go beyond measurable cognitive sets of skills, therefore they are better understood through theories that emphasize the role of sociocultural contexts in shaping students’ academic experiences.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to contribute to the body of literature on minoritized students’ transitions from high school to college by drawing on ethnographic methods and sociocultural theories of literacies and identities to examine seven Latino/a students’ academic trajectories from spring semester of their senior year in high school through fall semester of their first year in college. Specifically, this study examines how literate identities and academic aspirations are constructed across spaces – out-of-school, at a high school, and in college classrooms – over the course of this transition. The study was conducted in the U.S-Mexico Southwest border region and involved three research sites: a high school, a community college, and a four-year university. All of the participants were considered first-generation college students, that is, “students who are the first members of their immediate families to attend college” (Chen, 2005, p. iii). Also, all of the participants were of Mexican origin – while five were U.S. - born, two were Mexico-born but were educated in U.S. public schools. Throughout this study, the participants are referred to as Latino/as. Even though choices of labels are always political and therefore controversial, my main reason to use the broad term Latino/as is that all of the participants identified themselves as

such. Latino/a also seemed more appropriate than Hispanics, a term that is often seen as “identifying with the oppressor, European Americans, and is a term of assimilation into the White American core culture with a consequent ‘loss’ of true cultural identity” (Garcia & Sanchez, 2016, p.10).

Like this study, previous research has examined ethnically minoritized students’ academic literacies in their transitions to college from a sociocultural perspective. Harklau (2001) conducted a year-long ethnographic study to examine four female language minoritized students’ perceptions on academic reading and writing as they transitioned from high school to college. Her study, however, focused on Vietnamese and Turkish students’ engagement with literacy practices within academic contexts only. Hungerford-Kresser (2008) examined five Latino/a students’ identity constructions through engagement with academic literacies in their first year of college. Even though Hungerford-Kresser’s study, like this dissertation study, took into account identity-making through literacy practices, the context of her study - a prestigious, predominantly White university - led to findings where literacy and identities intersected with racial issues. Similar to this dissertation study, Ruecker (2012) investigated U.S.-Mexico borderland youth’s academic literacies in their transitions from high school to college. Focusing on participants’ engagement with academic writing across college classes, the researcher found his participants’ development as academic writers had been deeply impacted by the No Child Left Behind Act. Coming from a low income high school, the students in Ruecker’s study were mostly exposed to “teach-to the-TAKS” writing instruction, therefore they were not well prepared for college-level writing. Even though Ruecker’s (2012) study shares similarities with this dissertation, his research specifically focused only on writing for academic purposes. Moreover, identity-making was not part of his theoretical framework.

In this study, then, identity is a key piece to understanding participants' in and out-of-school literacy practices. The intertwined relationship between literacies and identities and its usefulness as analytical lenses in this study will be explained in the next section.

Sociocultural perspectives on literacies and identities.

This study draws on sociocultural theories of literacies and identities to understand Latino/a youth's transitions from high school to college. Specifically, I draw on the large body of work known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) and the Figured Worlds theory to illuminate participants' processes of identity-making through the literacy practices of formal and more informal learning environments. The NLS scholars challenged the widespread view of literacy as a universal set of skills by the putting forth the notion of literacy as social practice. These authors often use the term *literacies* (in the plural) to emphasize that, as social practices, literacy varies across contexts and according to specific purposes (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Lea, 2008; Lea & Street, 2006; Russell, Lea, Parker, Street, & Donahue, 2009). In other words, the term literacies encompasses various ways of reading and writing in and outside of schools.

In addition to denoting reading and writing across contexts, the term literacies, in the plural, is also used in reference to the various modes of representation that have come about with globalization and advancements in technology. Many studies have explored how youth use technology as tools for learning and meaning-making by combining a variety of semiotic channels including visuals, sounds, and multiple languages (Black, 2009; Canagarajah, 2011; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo & Collazo, 2004). Some studies have also drawn attention to the gap between youth's in and out-of-school literacy practices (Black, 2009; Enright, 2011; Moje et al., 2004; Wiley, 2005). These studies expose the power relations embedded in literacy by showing that U.S. schools often privilege White, middle-class, Standard

English, page-bound literacies (New London Group, 1996) over youth's multilingual and multimodal everyday literacies. Relegating students' everyday literacies to out-of-school contexts equates with marginalizing their identities, which consequently impacts students' acquisition of academic literacies. Culturally responsive pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1994) are regarded as socially just pedagogies (Moje, 2007) because they draw on diverse students' everyday literacies, which represent their self-constructions through reading and writing practices that matter to them, to support the acquisition of academic literacies (Enright, 2011).

In this study, the NLS literature helps to shed light on how Latino/a youth negotiate literacies and identities while participating in different discourse communities such as social media, home, church, high school, and college. Gee's theory of Discourses (1996, 2012) is particularly useful in the discussion of literacies and identities across discourse communities. Gee (1996) defines Discourses (with capital D) as:

...a social association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role' (Gee, 1996, p. 131).

Gee's definition of Discourses implies that people draw on "identity kits" or different sets of social identities to gain membership in numerous discourse communities. In this study, as previously noted, I explore students' self-constructions through the literacies of out-of-school or "everyday" discourse communities as well as their identity constructions through the acquisition of academic discourses. In this study, I use the term *academic discourses* (Batholomae, 1985; Gee, 2012; Zamel, 1998) and *academic literacies* (Lea & Street, 2006; Lea, 2008; Russel et al., 2009) interchangeably to refer to the ways of reading, writing, thinking, and so on associated

with the discourse communities of formal learning environments. In other words, I use academic literacies and academic discourses to refer to the literacy practices related to specific disciplines (disciplinary literacy). Additionally, like Hungerford-Kresser (2008), I also use these terms to refer to literacy practices that cut across disciplines, such as notetaking, study habits, and self-monitoring strategies (these are typically referred to as “study skills” in the college readiness literature).

Along with the NLS and Gee’s elaboration on Discourses, I use the Figured Worlds theory to examine participants’ production and negotiation of identities across contexts. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) describe a figured world as “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others”(p.52). Figured worlds then are cultural worlds (or discourse communities) that are regulated by certain rules and conventions. In order to “figure in” a particular cultural world, social actors must “figure out” what are the collective practices valued its group members. The figured worlds theory then examines identity-making through collective practices where individuals are constantly positioned and position themselves in many ways. In the figured worlds of U.S. schools, for example, which are organized around White, middle class ways of knowing, ethnically and linguistically minoritized students are often positioned by labels such as “at risk,” “ELL,” “remedial/developmental.” These labels are symbolic artifacts to which students respond/react by accepting, resisting, ignoring, or opposing. Thus, the figured worlds is a theory of identities in practice and identities as positioning (Bartlett, 2007; Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001; Holland & Lave, 2009; Urrieta, 2007).

In this study, I look at participants' literacies as artifacts that mediate identity constructions across different cultural worlds – out-of-school, high school, and college. Within these major figured worlds, there are smaller ones like specific college classes, social media, church, and so on. In engaging with the literacies of these different figured worlds, participants are continuously going through processes of identity negotiations as they position and are positioned in various ways.

With the notion of literacies and identities as social practices in mind, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

-How do Latino/a youth construct and negotiate literacies and identities in their transitions from high school to college?

In order to answer this question, I found it necessary to investigate students' literacies and identities not only within academic contexts but also outside of them. The space of home, as we will see in chapter 4, was filled with artifacts, both material and symbolic, that shaped participants' perceptions of themselves as students and their aspirations for identities as college students.

Significance of the Study

This study attempts to contribute to existing literature on ethnically minoritized students' literacy practices in their transitions to college by examining the topic from a sociocultural perspective on literacies and identities. As previously mentioned, the literature on college readiness places high emphasis on cognitive skills and test scores as predictors of college access and success. Even though test scores may be indicators of academic preparedness, they do not necessarily imply that one is "college-ready." College readiness is a much broader concept that, besides academic preparedness, also involves college knowledge, that is, knowledge on how

postsecondary educational systems work, and college-going attitudes such as the ability to manage time wisely and draw on study strategies to navigate college classes. By utilizing sociocultural theories on literacies and identities, this study contributes to a more in-depth understanding of Latino/a students' transitions to college. Specifically, this study illuminates contextual factors that enable or constrain low income, ethnically minority, first-generation college students' access to and persistence in higher education.

As the study started with participant-observations in high school senior-level English classes, it provides implications for secondary level policy and practice so as to improve academic preparation and college readiness among minoritized students. Moreover, the second phase of the study, which consisted of following participants through their first semester in a community college and a four-year institution, revealed contextual challenges not only in relation to disciplinary reading and writing, but also regarding time management, study habits, and meeting faculty expectations. The analysis and interpretation of data through the use of ethnographic methodology, which strengthened my trust-based relationship with the participants, allowed for a broader, and yet deeper understanding of participants' struggles.

Thus, as I spent time “officially” collecting data through interview and observations and “unofficially” simply by “hanging out” with the participants, we developed a relationship of mutual *confianza* or mutual trust (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1992; Moll et al. 1994), which was a window to interpreting their academic challenges in relation to key life events that seemed to impact their first semester in college. Those events were analyzed in light of sociocultural theories that acknowledge the power of structural factors in limiting one's possibilities of identity constructions, but also highlight the agency that leads individuals to improvise by drawing on cultural resources available to them (Holland et al. 1998; Holland and Lave, 2009;

Urrieta, 2007). Thus, ethnographic methods and sociocultural theories of literacies and identities allowed for a clearer and more fair interpretation of participants' struggles in transitioning from a high school context to postsecondary contexts. With this in mind, besides implications for policymaking and teaching at the secondary level, this study also offers implications for postsecondary level practice and policymaking. Additionally, I also discuss implications for theory and research in the area of college readiness.

Positionality and Origins of the Study

In conducting this ethnographic study on Latino/a students' literacies and identities, one of my main concerns was to engage in an ongoing process of reflexivity on how my own identities and background intersected with or differed from the participants in this study. Ongoing reflection on those issues was particularly important during the analysis and interpretation of data, a stage where every qualitative researcher becomes more concerned with matters of representation, personal bias, and power relations. While the fact that the power relations in research are always uneven because, ultimately, the researcher is in charge of interpreting data and representing participants' experiences through her writing, I used reflexivity as a tool for awareness and acknowledgement of these uneven power relations and biases.

In some ways, my identities intersected with this study's participants as I also have my ethnic roots in Latin America. I was born and raised in Brazil; however, I moved to the U.S. in 2008. Immigrating to the U.S. positioned me as the "Other" – an outsider to the U.S. mainstream culture and language. Even though some of the participants in this study were U.S. born while others, like me, are immigrants, we still share a marginal position in this country because of our roots in the so called "third world" nations, specifically, Mexico and Brazil. Unfortunately, in

the U.S. context bilingualism became a valuable commodity among White middle class families whose first language is English; however, among ethnically minority groups, bilingualism is still seen as “lack” of English skills rather than an ability to communicate in two languages (Callahan, 2015).

The fact that this study’s participants and I share a marginal position in the U.S. society for our cultural and linguistic backgrounds is one of the reasons that led me to pursue a dissertation topic related to Latino/as literacies and identities. Nonetheless, other aspects of my multiple identities, which do not intersect with participants,’ also influenced my research interest. My English teacher identity is one of them. Before migrating to the U.S, I was an English as a Foreign (EFL) language teacher in Brazil, my home country, for eight years. My interest in languages, especially the English language, led me to pursue a B.A. in English in a public university in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Also, different from my participants, I was not the first in my family to obtain a college degree. When I was four years old, my father obtained a college degree in Education and soon after that, he went on to pursue a master’s degree in Education as well. My father then was a teacher and became a school principal, a position he held for over 20 years. My father’s trajectory was important in shaping who I am – someone who is eager for both learning and teaching. Thus, my father, as a role model for higher education, was a key figure in guiding me through my educational trajectory. The participants in this study, on the other hand, lived the paradox of wanting to become role models for higher education to inspire their younger siblings, and yet not being sure about what steps to take to accomplish that.

Thus, this study is the product of identities that intersected, therefore positioning me as an insider to this group of students, and identities that diverged, consequently positioning me as an

outsider. Positionality is further discussed in chapter 3, in which I lay out the lay out the methodology ad methods employed in this study.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in seven chapters as follows. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study by introducing the problem of college retention among Latino/a students who, most often, are deemed underprepared for college-level literacies. Underpreparation for college-level coursework is usually explained through cognitive perspectives in which literacy is seen as a set of skills that students “lack.” With this in mind, I make the case that there is a need for more studies to examine ethnically minoritized students’ academic literacies in their transitions to college through sociocultural perspectives that acknowledge the contextual role of literacies and its relationship to identities. In chapter 2, I provide an in-depth explanation of the theoretical framework which is informed by the NLS body of work as well as the Figured Worlds Theory. In this chapter, I also review the relevant literature on youth’s out-of-school literacies and identities as well as relevant literature on ethnically minoritized students’ academic literacies in their transitions to college. In chapter 3, I describe the methodology used in this study and justify my choice for ethnographic case study design. Also, I describe the procedures for participant selection, data collection and data analysis.

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I present my analysis of data. Chapter 4 explores participants’ literacies and identities outside academic contexts. The chapter provides a broad picture of participants’ identity constructions through their bilingual, print-based as well as technology-mediated literacies outside of school. In addition to showing identity-making through the literacies aforementioned, the chapter also shows how discourses and practices in the space of home seemed to strongly influence participants’ aspirations for identities as college students. In

chapter 5, I explore the figured world of the high school where data collection for this study started. In this chapter, I focus on students' engagement with literacy practices of two senior-level English classes. Specifically, I examine whether those two English classes were conducive to a college-going culture by drawing on students' cultural and linguistic resources for supporting the acquisition of academic literacies and by nurturing their aspirations for identities as college students.

In chapter 6, I explore students' engagement with academic literacies in the contexts of a local community college and a four-year university. The chapter specifically focuses on the literacies within the disciplines of English Composition, History, and Psychology, in which participants had a greater amount of reading and/or writing. Furthermore, several participants reported having struggled with the literacy practices in one or more of those disciplines. The second half of chapter 6 presents students' reflections on their academic preparation and academic experiences in their first semester of college. Finally, the chapter presents an analysis of each participant's process of identity-making during their transitions from high school to college. This analysis takes into consideration out-of-school factors that seemed to have impacted students' first semester in college. In chapter 7, I discuss the main findings and implications for research, theory, policy and practice.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Review of the Relevant Literature

Introduction

In this chapter, I present three theoretical perspectives that inform my understanding of literacy and identities. Those perspectives are: (1) the New Literacy Studies (NLS); (2) Gee's Discourses theory; and (3) the figured worlds theory. These three theories are grounded in the view of literacies and identities as social practices. Specifically, they examine literacy as situated practices that mediate the construction of identities. Each of the theories that comprise the framework of this study are discussed within subsections. In the subsection titled "Sociocultural perspectives on literacy," I introduce the New Literacy Studies' contributions to the understanding of literacy as situated practices, often mediated by digital technologies. Next, in "Globalization, the New Literacies, and Multicultural Identities," I present Gee's theory of Discourses to discuss academic literacy acquisition and the complexities of negotiating literacies and identities in academic contexts. In "Identity-making in figured worlds," I introduce the figured worlds theory which, like Gee's Discourses theory, sheds light on identity formation through engagement with literacies across contexts. The figured world theory, however, enables a deeper examination of literacies and identities by drawing on Vygotsky's notion of semiotic mediation to explain how identities are constructed through collective practices and artifacts. In this study, the figured worlds theory is particularly helpful for understanding minoritized students' socialization in the cultural world of college. Finally, my explanation of the figured worlds theory is followed by a discussion on ethnically minoritized students' access to and success in U.S. higher education.

Sociocultural Perspectives on Literacy

Emerging in the 1980's, the large body of work that is currently known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) mainly stems from the fields of linguistics, sociology, and anthropology. The NLS posits that, rather than a universal set of skills, the notion of literacy is better captured through a sociocultural perspective. From this perspective, literacy is the product of (and produces) social practices (Gee, 2012). According to Gee (2012), the widespread notion of literacy as a set of skills stems from historically ingrained dichotomies in which urban societies were considered “civilized” and “advanced” for their technologies, including literacy. In contrast, smaller communities who relied solely on orality were seen as “primitive” people who were unable to engage in higher-order thinking for being “illiterate.” There was an assumption that the teaching of reading and writing, as a decontextualized set of skills, not only would “civilize” oral communities but would also enable upward mobility.

Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole (1981) explored the dichotomy writing versus orality; however, they did that in the context of a research study they conducted to examine the presumed positive effects of literacy and/or formal schooling on cognition (Scribner & Cole, 1981). Their research focused on the Vai people whose literacy practices include English, which is formally taught; an indigenous syllabic script, which is informally learned; and Arabic. Each of these literacies is used for different purposes such as understanding issues related to government, keeping records, and memorizing the Koran. Scribner and Cole's (1981) research with the Vai in the 1970's highly contributed to the understanding of literacy because of two main findings: first, literacy was not found to be a sufficient condition to perform well on tasks that involve abstraction, logic, memory, and communication; second, social practices were crucial in improving specific types of skills related to them. In other words, the ability to read

and write in itself did not ensure success in performing a task. Rather, socialization into practices that are common to a group enhances specific sets of skills. Scribner and Cole's (1981) findings were important because they helped to challenge the assumption that only literate individuals are able to develop higher order thinking skills. Additionally, these findings pointed to literacy as social practice, a core concept supported by the NLS scholars.

Similarly to Scribner and Cole (1981), Street (1984) contributed to a deeper understanding of literacy as social practice and drew attention to the power relations embedded in it by setting forth two perspectives on literacy – the autonomous and the ideological. The autonomous view of literacy is regarded as simplistic and ethnocentric (Street, 2003b; Street, 2011) because it assumes that the internalization of a universalistic set of skills – typically based on White, middle class language and culture, ensures upward mobility for anyone regardless of their socioeconomic and cultural background. In contrast with the autonomous model, Street (2003b) proposes the ideological model which stresses the contextual role of literacy. The term “ideological” reminds us that social groups are guided by different ideologies that determine which types of literacy practices count as valid ways of knowing. In other words, there is not a single set of skills that are equally valued by all social groups. Instead, particular groups “practice” and value literacies differently.

The Local versus the global.

Although Brian Street's theorization on literacy as situated social practices, he received criticisms for supposedly overemphasizing the contextual role of literacy. Brandt and Clinton (2002) claimed that new technologies, for example, are not products of local practices. Rather, they are invented in “distant” locations and mediate certain types of literacy practices that infiltrate local communities. For Brandt and Clinton (2002) technology-mediated practices

originated in “distant” places would be examples of how literacy leans more towards the autonomous model rather than the ideological model. In response to Brandt and Clinton’s (2002) argument, Street (2003a) acknowledges that the New Literacy Studies might have overemphasized the contextual role of literacy and, to some extent, disregarded the influence of global changes. He points out that new technologies as well as international agencies such as UNESCO and educational policies at the national level have an impact on local literacy practices.

Street (2003a) argues, however, that those “distant” or global factors affecting local communities are better understood within the ideological model rather than from the autonomous perspective. He explains that the global factors previously mentioned are the products of major ideological discourses on what counts as literacy. These discourses have the power to permeate and influence local communities because they are produced by hegemonic groups. Besides explaining that, Street (2003a) claims that Brandt and Clinton’s (2002) argument that new technologies have somehow standardized literacy practices is flawed. He argues that the role of technologies is to mediate social practices – they are not social practices themselves. Thus, even though social practices are shaped by media, individuals have agency in adapting global media for local purposes.

Globalization, the New Literacies, and Multicultural Identities

In their seminal publication entitled “A pedagogy of multiliteracies,” The New London Group (1996) draws attention to the need for effective pedagogical practices to serve the diverse student population in the globalized world. As this publication highlights, globalization has deeply affected youth’s literacies and identities. Because globalization has led to intensifying flows of migration and advancements in technology, school settings have become comprised of

unprecedented number of multicultural and multilingual youth (Garcia, 2009: Garcia, Bartlett, & Kleifgen, 2007). These culturally and linguistically diverse youth engage with multimodal literacy practices or “hybrid literacies” (Moje, 2002) that reflect the identities they have constructed through participation in various spaces such as home, peer groups, and online social networking.

Drawing on Moll, Veléz-Ibañez and Greenberg, Moje and colleagues (2004) see youth’s literacy practices as funds of knowledge that usually derive from popular culture and are often mediated by new technologies. Thus, youth’s identities are multimodal in many ways, that is, they are constructed through the mediation of various semiotic channels or modes of representation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). These include speech, writing, visuals, and sound - resources that, combined in different ways, serve as tools for (re)designing meanings (New London Group, 1996; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Despite their richness, youth’s multiliterate practices which are part of their funds of knowledge, often remain outside the school walls as schools tend to value print-based literacies around standard varieties of a language (New London Group, 1996).

The sophistication of youth’s out-of-school literacies is well documented in the literature. In her ethnographic study, Black (2009) investigated online fan fiction communities where adolescent English language learners participated in activities related to popular literature such as Harry Potter books. Drawing on the NLS theory, the author explored online spaces as opportunities for writing and developing L2. The study focused on the practices of three multilingual immigrant young women. Through interviews, participant observation, and analysis of written texts, the author found that participants carried out complex activities such as peer reviewing, collaborative writing, and the use of various genres of writing. Black (2009) found

the informal online space of fan fiction communities were beneficial because ELLs received “explicit feedback on grammar and spelling as well as story elements such as plot, characterization, and adherence to genre” (p. 692). Fan communities are just one example of out-of-school literacy practices that enable youth to not only acquire advanced technological skills but also develop the ability to deal with print materials in formal learning environments.

As demonstrated in Black’s (2009) study, youth’s out-of-school literacies can be very creative and elaborated; nonetheless, they may not be regarded as such within schools (Black, 2009; Moje et al., 2004; Wiley, 2005). The exclusion of youth’s multimodal literacies from formal learning settings is one example of how power relations are always embedded in literacy. The power relations surrounding literacy practices are further explored in the next section by introducing Gee’s Discourses theory. This theory illuminates the challenges students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds typically face in the process of acquiring academic discourses.

Literacies, Identities, and Power

The power relations embedded in literacy as well as the link between literacy and identity become more evident through Gee’s (1996; 2012) theory of Discourses (with capital D). As a New Literacy scholar, sociolinguist James P. Gee also understands literacy as social practice. He theorizes that, in order to gain acceptance in a social group, one must embody the Discourses shared by the group members. Gee (1996) defines Discourses as:

...a social association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artifacts’, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social

network,’ or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role’ (Gee, 1996, p. 131).

Gee’s (1996) definition of Discourses helps to reinforce the notion of literacy as social practice as it implies that individuals must draw on various “identity kits” or “social identities” (Gee, 2012) in order to gain membership in specific discourse communities. Gee (2012) goes on to make a distinction between what he calls “primary” and “secondary” discourses. *Primary discourses*, as the author explain, are acquired through socialization with family members, our primary discourse communities, whereas *secondary discourses* are acquired through participation in public spheres such as synagogues, educational institutions, and workplaces. Although there are distinctions between primary and secondary discourses, they cannot be seen as binaries. On the contrary, strongly opposing dichotomies such as literate/illiterate, formal/informal, and written/oral language, Gee (1989; 1996; 2012) argues that discourses must be seen as a continuum. He adds that, in the same way language transfer is a common phenomenon among bilingual students, transfers between primary and secondary discourses are inevitable.

The process of acquiring secondary discourses, however, is not always natural and uncomplicated. On the contrary, it can be contentious, especially for culturally and linguistically diverse students whose primary literacies and identities often highly differ from the typical white, middle class, Standard English discourses of schools (Gee, 2012). In some cases, culturally diverse students may resist or even oppose the secondary discourses of schools. For a clearer understanding of diverse students’ struggles in acquiring the discourses of school, it is important to closely look at what those discourses entail. Thus, the following section provides

more detailed explanation on academic discourses which, in this study, are also referred to as academic literacies.

The challenges of academic literacies acquisition.

In order to have a more in-depth understanding of the challenges of developing academic literacies, it is important to detail all elements that this term encompasses. Enright (2011) argues that, historically, the notion of academic literacy has been centered on cognitive aspects of learning, therefore definitions of the term highlighted “particular skills involved in decoding and composing text-based curricular materials” (p. 84). From a sociocultural perspective, however, Enright (2011) defines academic literacy as “The skills and strategies used by young people engaged in academic work that involves reading, writing, and other formal school-sanctioned modes of representation” (p. 86). Enright (2011) goes on to say that academic literacies, in the plural, is a more appropriate terminology because it not only signals general academic knowledge and dispositions that support learning across curricular contexts, but it also encompasses the concept of disciplinary literacies, that is, the academic knowledge that supports learning within disciplines or content areas. Thus, in this study, the term academic literacies and academic discourses are used interchangeably so as to include: (a) study strategies and study habits that help students to succeed across disciplines. These, in the college readiness literature, have been referred to as “cognitive skills” and “academic behaviors” (Conley, 2007; 2010), and include critical thinking ability and self-monitoring ability (i.e., self-assessment and time management); (b) more specific literacies that support learning within content areas. These are called disciplinary literacies.

The acquisition of academic discourses can be particularly challenging for low income students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ from mainstream students, that is,

“students who are native speakers of nonstigmatized or standard varieties of English” (Valdés, 1992, p. 89). From a functional linguistics perspective on academic literacies, the challenges linguistically diverse students face relate specifically to academic language as “students are expected to read, write, and speak at school using language that presents knowledge that is formal, technical, and distanced from everyday life” (Schleppegrell, 2004, p. 49). Thus, although discourses vary across disciplines, formality and technicality are two features that set academic language apart from everyday discourses. Drawing on Halliday’s functional linguistic theory, Schleppegrell (2004) points out that, regardless of the context, language always produces three types of meanings concomitantly. Those are: ideational meaning, which reflects the content of the text; interpersonal meaning, which refers to “voice” (author’s or speaker’s attitudes and judgments embedded in messages); and finally textual meaning, which relates to how language is used to structure messages.

Constructing the three types of meanings described above is a complex task that requires ability to deal with dense, abstract, and technical features of language (Schleppegrell, 2004). Density relates to how information is embedded in a text. It is difficult for students to grasp the meaning of a paragraph structured with subordinated clauses and nominalizations, for example. Abstraction in academic language refers to concepts whose meanings are not easily explained with synonyms or dictionary definitions. While reading a history text, for instances, students may come across concepts such as “social contract” and “government” which may not be clear in the text itself thus requiring that students draw on their prior-knowledge. Technicality in academic texts refers to technical vocabulary characterizing different disciplines (Schleppegrell, 2004).

Schleppegrell (2004) underscores that organizing information in writing is another challenge faced by students. This is considered a challenge because students need to be aware of

the discourse features characterizing different genres or text types. Moje (2007) highlights that, in the discipline of history, for example, students are generally required to produce chronologically organized historical accounts. When writing historical accounts students must display not only knowledge of content but also critical thinking (Moje, 2007). On the other hand, scientific texts heavily rely on technical vocabulary and are built around procedures and explicit explanations that demonstrate cause-effect relationships (Moje, 2007; Shanahan et al., 2011). Consequently, agency is suppressed in scientific texts (Shanahan et al., 2011). Several scholars have stressed the need for explicit instruction to help students negotiate “agency” (Shanahan et al., 2011), “voice” (Canagarajah, 2011; Ivanic & Camps, 2001), or “authoritative instance” (Bartholomae, 1985; Schleppegrell, 2004) in academic writing.

As this section has shown, the acquisition of academic literacies, specifically academic language, is complicated. The next section expands the discussion on academic language development among English language learners.

ELLs and academic language.

As shown in the previous section, the acquisition of academic literacies is complicated and it is even more so for language minoritized students. Schonewise and Klingner (2012) contend that, even though students at the secondary level are expected to be reading to learn, many of them are still be struggling with learning to read because texts become notably denser in terms of conceptual knowledge and academic language. Learning content while acquiring academic language is certainly more difficult for English language learners who are a highly diverse group. Schonewise and Klingner (2012) explain that the term ELL may apply to first, second, and third-generation American-born students and there may be great variations in levels of proficiency in both L1 and L2 among ELLs. While some are sequential bilinguals, that is, they

only start acquiring L2 by entering the school system, others are simultaneous bilinguals which means that they started developing both L1 and English at home at very early ages (Schonewiese & Klingner, 2012). Schonewiese and Klingner (2012) assert that “more than half of the ELLs in secondary schools are U.S.-born and therefore likely to be simultaneous bilinguals” (p. 53). The authors add that the quality of instruction, among other factors, determine the rate at which students will develop academic language and how well they will be able to develop it; nonetheless, it usually takes 5 to 7 years for simultaneous bilinguals to acquire academic language. The extended period of time it takes for acquiring academic language seems to impact college transition. Research has shown that many U.S.-educated language minority students are deemed underprepared for college level academic literacies (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008; Kibler et al., 2011; Salas et al., 2011).

Valdés (1992) uses the term “circumstantial bilinguals” to refer to language minoritized students in the U.S. According to her, these students develop bilingualism because of the circumstances they find themselves in - coming from immigrant families or indigenous background, the acquisition of the dominant language is a matter of survival for them (Valdés, 1992). Circumstantial bilinguals often speak a contact variety of English acquired in daily interactions within enclave communities composed of immigrants (Valdés & Figueroa, as cited in Bunch & Panayotova, 2008). Because of the linguistic diversity within enclave communities, both L1 and L2 are susceptible to variations, therefore language minoritized students may speak a variety of English that is distant from the academic English expected in school settings (Roberge, 2009). Unfortunately, even though these students may be competent users of the English language, they are still seen from a deficit perspective because of their language varieties deviate from the so called “Standard English.”

Valdés (1992; 2004) goes on to argue that deficit views of minoritized language speakers result from a limited understanding of bilinguals and bilingualism. Valdés (1992; 2004) extensively discusses how such limited understanding compromises minoritized students' assessment, placement, and achievement throughout K-16 education. Nonnative-like expressions that persist in the speech and writing of circumstantial bilinguals, according to Valdés (1992; 2004), is one of the reasons leading English language professionals to identify these students as in need of remediation.

This section discussed how academic language acquisition poses extra challenges for linguistically minority students. In the next section I draw on Gee's sociolinguistics perspectives to continue exploring the relationship between literacy acquisition and identities, which is an essential aspect of this study.

Negotiations of literacies and identities.

Having explained the challenges of academic discourses from a functional linguistics-oriented perspective, I now return to Gee's (2012) Discourses approach to highlight the complexities of negotiating identities amidst the power relations involved in the acquisition of academic discourses. As previously mentioned, from Gee's (2012) sociolinguistics perspective, discourses are "identity kits", therefore acquiring secondary discourses entails performing middle-class identities. As Bartholomae (1985) puts it, for successful integration into the culture of the university, students need to "appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse" (1985, p. 403). Students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds may resist the identities linked to certain situated literacy practices. A clear example of resistance to secondary discourses is provided by Esquinca (2012) in his study with a bicultural pre-service teacher at a Hispanic-Serving Institution on the U.S. - Mexico border. The study focused on the biliterate practices of

Betty, a pre-service math and science teacher. Because Betty had completed most of her education in Mexico, her home country, she resisted socialization into the mathematics discourse in the U.S context. Caught between ideologies on “the way math is done” in each of the two countries, the pre-service teacher resisted the writing of multimodal texts, a mathematical discourse practice valued by her instructor in the U.S. Despite resistance, the pre-service teacher still positioned herself as a mathematics teacher; however, this identity was mostly shaped by math discourses she was primarily socialized into in her first language and in the Mexican context.

Esquinca’s (2012) study shows how literacy development, as a contextual social practice, can be complex for culturally diverse students. In order to succeed in her math class in the U.S context, the pre-service teacher in the study had to embody “the way math was done,” which involved multimodality. This is not to imply, however, that math is done in the same way in all math classes in the U.S. or even in the same postsecondary institution. Scholars have stressed that disciplinary genres are not clear cut (Lea & Street, 2006; Lea, 2008; Russell, Lea, Parker, Street, & Donahue, 2009). From the perspective of the New Rhetoric School, genres are considered both social and cognitive (Johns, 2008). This implies that, after becoming familiar with different types of texts, writers develop cognitive structures, or schemas, about the genres underlying those texts. Schemas, however, are not fixed – writers will reshape them according to the purposes they have in mind. If the purpose is to develop an abstract for a conference, for instance, the author will make appropriate adaptations to ensure that her abstract meets the specific requirements of the audience who, in this case, are the reviewers (Johns, 2008). In this regard, even though there are features that distinguish writing across disciplines, genres may

vary within disciplinary fields, according to specific tasks and professors' expectations (Lea & Street, 2006; Lea, 2008; Russell, Lea et al., 2009; Zamel, 1998).

As this section has shown, literacy is intrinsically related to questions of identity and power. While scholars have argued that schools commit symbolic violence by imposing the dominant culture on minoritized students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), other scholars have emphasized the need for equipping minoritized students with the culture of power so that they are able to critique and possibly transform it (Delpit, 1989; Janks, 2000; Moje, 2007). Access to the culture of power, however, does not mean to validate middle-class culture at the expense of diverse students' own cultural backgrounds. Rather, schools should use culturally responsive pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1994) or socially just pedagogies (Moje, 2007) that capitalize on students' funds of knowledge as a means support the leaning of academic literacies. Moje (2007) claims that a pedagogy for social justice is powerful because it draws on students' funds-of-knowledge, or everyday literacies and identities, as resources and also as tools for critical literacy – they enable students to compare and contrast different ways of knowing and question dominant knowledge. Additionally, a pedagogy for social justice allows students to reconstruct meanings because, as scholars have emphasized, no meaning is static (Moje, 2007; Zamel, 1998).

In an ethnographic study conducted with bilingual Latino/a students in an urban school in Detroit, Moje and colleagues (2004) argue for the support of third spaces as a means to bridge youth's everyday discourses and disciplinary discourses. Drawing on the funds of knowledge and hybridity theories as well as Gee's approach to Discourses, this ethnographic study examined how bilingual students' everyday literacies intersected with academic literacies within the content area of science. Hybridity theory suggests that individuals naturally draw on their background knowledge built in various sociocultural spaces to participate in a new social

environment. The spaces where various, sometimes even opposing, discourses intersect are called third spaces. Thus, focusing on a sample of thirty predominantly Latino/a bilingual students, Moje et al. (2004) were interested in examining knowledge production in third spaces. Findings indicated that youth drew on multiple sources of knowledge like families, communities, peers, and popular culture to make sense of what was learned in their science classrooms. The researchers also found that, even though, in interviews, the youth demonstrated great rhetorical ability to navigate in and out-of-school discourse communities, they rarely made use of these funds of knowledge inside schools. Presuming that the youth might have internalized the binary of academic versus everyday literacies, Moje et al. (2004) suggest that, for third spaces to occur inside classrooms, teachers must explicitly encourage students to draw on their hybrid discourses.

Another ethnographic study, conducted by Kibler (2010), exemplifies how linguistically diverse students can benefit from drawing on their first language as resources to support the development of academic literacies. Specifically, the study focused on how four Latino/a English language learners relied on their first language, Spanish, as resource to engage in an extended, interdisciplinary writing assignment in a high school classroom. During class observations, the researcher paid attention to how meanings were negotiated around text production – students who had reached an intermediate level of English proficiency served as language brokers or interpreters for beginning level ELLs. Findings indicated that language brokers facilitated student-student conversations as well as interactions among beginning level ELLs and the English monolingual teacher.

Findings also suggested that the four Latino/a youth switched between the roles of novices and experts in relation to their engagement with the assigned task, knowledge of

academic content as well as rhetorical and linguistic forms. This fluidity between the roles of novice and expert illuminates the different types of knowledge related to writing that the students already possess and their ability to strategically apply prior-knowledge to the completion of new tasks. Kibler (2010) ascribed the students' different types of knowledge and variances in knowledge level to background experiences in and out of schools as well as individual factors such as level of language proficiency. Kibler's (2010) study highlights the value of translanguaging, a stigmatized practice in U.S. formal educational contexts (Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia, 2009), as a useful pedagogical tool in classes that have become increasingly multilingual because of globalization.

Moje et al.'s (2004) and Kibler's (2010) studies highlight the potential pedagogical benefits of drawing on diverse students' funds of knowledge for supporting the acquisition of academic discourses. Equally important, however, is to foster a culturally responsive pedagogy that provides minoritized students with explicit instruction on the rules and conventions of academic language as well as explicit instruction on how to negotiate literacies and identities (Delpit, 1988; Canagarajah, 2011; Moje, 2007). In addition to explicit instruction, other strategies that have been identified as useful in supporting linguistically diverse students' development of academic literacies include timely feedback and modeling (Duff, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011).

Explicit instruction on rules and conventions underlying academic writing and, more specifically disciplinary writing, is crucial for culturally and linguistically diverse students whose ways of knowing often differ from mainstream students. In this regard, explicit instruction a matter of social justice – in order to successfully navigate the educational system all the way to college, diverse students need to be taught the “rules of the game” that regulate academic

discourses (Ramírez-Dhoore & Jones, 2007). By learning the rules of the game low income students have better chances to participate in and, most importantly, to critique and possibly reconstruct dominant ways of knowing (Delpit, 1989; Janks, 2000; Moje, 2007).

To conclude this section, Gee's Discourse theory is used in this study to shed light on participants' negotiations of identities and literacies in academic contexts. The next section, I discuss the third theory that comprise the framework of this study: the figured worlds theory.

Identity-Making in Figured Worlds

Besides Gee's (1996) elaboration on Discourses, the theory of figured worlds complements this study's framework by examining literacy and identity constructions in practice through the mediation of artifacts. Drawing on sociocultural perspectives on identity, Holland et al. (1998) describe the notion of figured world as "a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others"(p.52). Figured worlds can be thought of as cultural worlds or discourse communities regulated by collective artifacts which are ascribed symbolic value by their members. As Holland et al. (1998) exemplify, in the figured world of alcoholics anonymous, poker chips are ascribed a special meaning - they symbolize sobriety. Because individuals in this community seek to achieve stable sobriety, the acquisition of poker chips grant them a certain status in the group. Through the lens of Holland et al.'s (1998) framework, poker chips are socially constructed artifacts that hierarchically position individuals in relation to their peers in the group. What one *is* and their aspirations of what to *become* help to regulate their future behavior.

The notion of cultural artifacts as regulating devices stems from Vygotsky's elaboration on semiotic mediation (Holland et al. 1998; Holland & Lave, 2009). The poker chips previously

mentioned are tools created by humans to serve specific purposes; however, new culturally constructed meanings and uses can be ascribed to them over time. A handkerchief, for instance, is a tool that has been commonly used for a set of practical purposes; nonetheless, the act of tying a knot in a handkerchief has a new culturally constructed meaning – it works as a memory device (Holland et al., 1998). Thus, external objects (cultural artifacts) help to regulate cognitive processes resulting in modified behavior (Holland et al. 1998). From the perspective of identity theorists, cultural artifacts “open up figured worlds” (Bartlett & Holland, 2002, p. 13). This means that every figured world is organized around artifacts which are the product of human activity but also have the function of regulating human actions. This implies that, at the same time individuals shape a figured world, their identities are shaped by it as well. Therefore, figured worlds are “spaces of practice wherein actors form as well as perform” (Bartlett & Holland, 2002).

Another example is an English class within the figured world of a high school, one of the contexts of this study. This figured world is formed by students who interact with artifacts that are meaningful to that broad community– textbooks, notebooks, exams, and so on. At the same time students’ interaction with such artifacts give life to the figured world of this particular English class, students are also “figured” in such a world, that is, they are positioned in certain ways depending on how well they “perform” in this community. Low performance on exams, for example, may position one as “mediocre” and consequently her or his status will be peripheral in relation to the community (Holland et al., 1998). In this sense, exams are material artifacts that are both the product of human activity but also produce certain types of students. In order to be recognized as a “successful student” one needs to “figure out” and embody the types of practices or ways of knowing valued by social actors in this context.

Labels such as “successful student” versus “at risk student” and the discourses and narratives around them are also considered artifacts within figured worlds (Holland et al. 1998, Bartlett & Holland, 2002). Similarly to material artifacts like the poker chips in the world of alcoholic anonymous, labels, discourses, and narratives are the products of human activity which are ascribed special meanings within a context. Those meanings impact individuals’ emotions to varying extents leading them to distinctive types of responses to these positionings (Holland & Lave, 2009). Because discourses can be powerful cultural artifacts, it is necessary to better understand how they relate to identity construction within the figured worlds framework.

Drawing on Foucault’s formulation on power/knowledge and constructivist theories, Holland et al. (1998) explain that “Selves are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses” (p. 26). In other words, discourses, which are also socially constructed, can be powerful artifacts influencing identity development as they position individuals in different ways. The power of a discourse, however, directly relates to one’s status in a given group; social class, gender, and ethnicity typically are determining factors in validating or excluding certain types of discourses. Within educational institutions, discourses that identify students as “at risk” or “successful” are socially and historically constructed and legitimized by hegemonic groups. More specifically, white, middle-class groups have historically held the power to validate their own culture and language through discourses that position themselves as the “civilized/literate” while other cultural groups are positioned as the “primitive/illiterate” (Gee, 2011). In the U.S. school context, the hegemony of the English language and Anglo culture helps to reproduce discourses that position minoritized students as the “Other”, the “deviant”, “culturally deprived”, “at risk”, among other labels. It becomes clear then that figured worlds, like any social institution, are structured around particular rules, conventions, and values that privilege certain

practices or “ways of being” and consequently marginalize others. The power of social structures within figured worlds poses constraints to social actors who are expected to perform in certain ways for gaining recognition. Taking academic and nonacademic spaces as examples of figured worlds, Luttrell and Parker (2001) claim that “as students fashion themselves through their daily literacy practices they negotiate their place within the hierarchy of figured worlds” (p. 239).

The next section explores individuals’ responses to positionings within figured worlds. Besides a theoretical explanation, the section presents empirical studies to illustrate the discussion.

Authoring selves.

As explained earlier, powerful discourses are cultural artifacts that are the product of human activity but also regulate future behavior. In any given figured world individuals are positioned in certain ways by engagement in collective practices. Urrieta (2007) describes positionality as “the positions ‘offered’ to people in different figured worlds” (p. 111). Positionings will always produce responses - while some individuals will embrace some types of positionings offered to them, others will resist, or oppose (Urrieta, 2007). Drawing on the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, Holland et al. (1998) explain that individuals are constantly going through internal processes of negotiating positionings. Being labeled “at risk,” for example, may lead a student to engage in internal dialogues so as to make sense of his or her positionality in relation to others. The student may opt for repositioning or re-authoring him or herself by drawing on the resources available to them (Holland and Lave, 2001; Barton, Kang, Tan, O’Neill, Bautista-Guerra & Brecklin, 2013). Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that the chances of (re)-authoring selves within figured worlds are unequal - historically

marginalized individuals usually face more struggles in the production of selves, particularly within highly regulated cultural worlds (Holland & Lave, 2001; Holland & Lave, 2009).

The space of authoring reinforces the notion that figured words are not stable – as any institution they are socially and historically constructed through human activity. Cultural artifacts, either in the form of material objects or powerful discourses, are the product of human activity. At the same time, cultural artifacts also produce activities as they regulate human behavior. Thus figured worlds are spaces of structure and agency – they are organized around a certain set of rules meant to regulate behavior; however, cultural worlds are also partially constructed by the self-in-practice. In this sense, within figured worlds identities are not fixed – they are fluid, hybrid, and sometimes contradictory (Holland et al., 1998).

An ethnographic case study conducted by Bartlett (2007) illustrates the production of selves across cultural contexts. In this four-year ethnographic study, Bartlett (2007) used the figured words theory to examine social relations and identity construction in a bilingual high school for immigrant newcomer youth in New York. The study focuses on Maria’s educational trajectory across her high school classes – while the student was recognized as a “good student” in her Spanish class, she was struggling with other classes such as English, history, and math, which also required the students to draw on their English literacies along with Spanish. Even though Maria struggled in the classes where English literacies were required, she was still recognized by her teachers as a “good student” because, in that school, the model of “successful student” was not restrictedly based on grades and monolingualism. Instead, it valued hard work and bilingualism. Maria’s recognition as a “hardworking student” and “proficient Spanish speaker” motivated her to invest even more efforts to reposition herself in the other classes. The

young Latina was able to develop her English language abilities faster than her peers and started to get better grades across classes.

Luttrell and Parker (2001) drew on ethnographic methods and the figured worlds theory to examine youth's literacy practices in and outside schools. The study was part of a major research study on literacy and it gathered data from four high schools in North Carolina. One of the main findings of this study was the gap between students' personal literacies and the school literacies – even though many students were avidly engaged in the reading and writing of things that were interesting to them, these literacy practices remained outside the school. This gap contributed to the students describing themselves as not good readers or writers, a perception based on students' relation with school sanctioned literacies. This study particularly focused on one student, Alice, whose personal literacies involved the reading of novels and the writing of poetry. The student also kept a journal where she reflected on personal experiences as well as aspirations for the future, including college goals. This study clearly showed how the gap between in and out-of-school literates interfered with the production of identities by describing Alice's experience with one of her English class assignments. Alice's English teacher had assigned a small project in which the students had to choose a poem for an aesthetic valuation project. Alice then chose a poem that she really passionate about but the teacher told her that that poem would require too much research and advised the student to use one of the poems from the textbook instead. The authors conclude by arguing that students like Alice often need to negotiate identities as schools do not acknowledge their personal literacies. Rather than students' personal figured worlds and the figured worlds of school, teachers sometimes opt for “minimal and unchallenging” (p. 245) school sanctioned literacy practices. As a result, students may feel

demotivated and disengaged, which will automatically position them as “lazy” and “struggling” students.

Wortham (2004) explored one ninth grader’s process of identity production in the context of one class over the course of a year. In that class, English and History were taught in combination and the students were expected to participate in seminars based on various books. Wortham (2004) points out that class, the model of “good student” was based on the students’ ability to pose genuine questions and defend their positions on relevant issues from the books. Findings showed how Tyisha’s, one student in that class, identity shifted from “good student” to “disruptive” and “outcast.” Because during class discussions Tyisha would sometimes use her personal opinions rather than solid arguments to defend her views, her teachers and peers started to see her as a disruptive student who just wasted class time. Even though the role of the teachers in that class was to help students to develop strong argumentation, the teachers chose to simply dismiss Tyisha’s comments which turned her into an “outcast.” At times, the student seemed to resist this identity by trying to follow the model of participation that the teachers valued; however, over time she started to embrace her positioning as “outcast” and “disruptive.” In other words, such positionings became identities that “thickened” over the course of the year. Wortham’s (2004) study shows that identities not only shift across spaces. They also shift in relation to events and the interaction with people participating in those events.

This section explained the theory of figured worlds and, by presenting empirical studies, demonstrated how this theory has been applied to understand the complexities of identity production in practice among secondary school students. In this dissertation study, the figured worlds theory helped to shed light on how bilingual students’ academic identities were

(re)constructed through engagement with literacy practices across the out-of-school spaces as well as across the academic spaces of high school and college.

Having explored the relationship between literacy and identity through all the theories that guide this study – the NLS, Gee’s Discourses, and the figured worlds theory, I now turn to a discussion of underrepresented students’ transitions to college.

Minoritized Students’ Transitions to College

So far, this chapter has shown how sociocultural perspectives on literacies and identities are useful in the examination of identities constructions through literacy practices inside and outside schools. Because educational institutions hardly ever draw on students’ out-of-school literacies as resources to support academic literacies (Black, 2009; Moje et al., 2004), students, especially from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, struggle to negotiate literacies and identities. The gap between in and out of school literacies contributes to the perpetuation of deficit ideologies as minoritized youth are seen as students who “lack” knowledge.

In this section, I explore minoritized students’ transitions from high school to college. This discussion will show how current measures of college readiness, mostly based on cognitive skills, are unfair to minoritized students.

College readiness and academic preparedness.

Ethnically minoritized students, who are more likely to be first-generation and economically disadvantaged, face particular challenges in entering higher education and obtaining a college degree (Duncheon, 2015). Data from the Pew Hispanic Center (2015) show that, even though the number of Latino/a youth attending higher education has more than tripled in the past two decades, this ethnic group still lags behind in obtaining a four-year degree. In

2013, only 15% of Latino/a youth ages 25-29 had a Bachelor's degree. In contrast, about 40% of their white peers had a bachelor's degree or higher (Krogstad, 2015). One of the factors associated to Latino/as low number of Bachelor's degree attainment is their overrepresentation in community colleges - approximately half of Latino/as in postsecondary institutions are enrolled in community colleges (Krogstad, 2015). Latino/as are also overrepresented in remedial or developmental courses in higher education (Kibler, Bunch, & Endris, 2011; Salas, Portes, D'Amico, & Rios-Aguilar, 2011). The low rates of Bachelor's degree attainment among Latino/as and their high representation in two-year institutions and remedial classes suggest that many of these students are not "college-ready."

According to Conley (2007), "college readiness" is currently determined by course titles such as Advancement Placement and Dual Credit courses, grade-point averages, and tests. In Texas, for example, many higher education institutions use high school graduates' TAKS exit-level scores as indicators of college readiness (Barnes & Slate, 2013). In a study to examine college readiness among high school graduates from public high schools in Texas, Barnes and Slate (2013) identified great gaps in college readiness by ethnicity. These gaps were determined by combining and averaging students' SAT, ACT, and TAKS exit-level scores on reading. Findings for the 2008-2009 academic year showed that Black and Latino/a students exhibited college-readiness rates in reading of 44.48% and 47.86%, respectively. In contrast, White students' college-readiness rate for the same academic year was 61.89%. Barnes and Slate (2013) highlight that, even though college readiness rates among Black and Latino/a students have increased for three consecutive years, 2007 to 2009, Whites' college readiness rates have also increased, therefore the achievement gap persists.

In an earlier publication, Barnes, Slate and Rojas-LeBouef (2010) argue that these assessment tools currently used to determine students' college readiness do not exactly serve their purpose. The authors claim that these tools measure academic preparedness which is just one aspect of college readiness. Also finding standardized measures of college readiness too narrow, Conley (2007) proposes a model that includes both cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions of college readiness. The cognitive dimensions are divided into strategies and habits of thinking that enable success across disciplines like critical thinking and writing, for example; and content-specific knowledge and strategies. Non-cognitive dimensions are divided into academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness. Academic behaviors relate to habits associated with success across disciplines such as time management, test preparation, note-taking, and communication with professors, peers, and academic advisors. Finally, contextual skills and awareness, also called "college Knowledge" (Barnes & Slate, 2013), refer to knowledge about the postsecondary system which include financial aid application and admission processes. Even though Conley's (2007) model of college readiness represents a broader view of the term, it still does not offer a critical analysis of what it means to be "college-ready" within the unjust socioeconomic and educational systems.

Researchers have pointed out that educational access and academic preparation in U.S. public schools are racialized. Released by the U.S. Department of Education, a report titled *The Condition of Education 2015* (Kena et al., 2015) revealed that in the 2012-13 academic year, Black and Hispanic students had the highest percentages of attendance at high-poverty public schools which are defined as schools where over 75% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. In the 2012-13 academic year, 45% of Black students and 45% of Hispanic students attended high-poverty public schools, while only 8% of White students were

matriculated at these schools (Kena et al., 2015). According to another report released by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2014), Black and Latino/a students are significantly more likely to have teachers with less experience and who are underpaid in comparison to their peers in other schools. Furthermore, White high school students have more access to advanced courses that help students prepare for college (i.e., Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, calculus). While 71% of White students have access to these courses, only 57% of Black students and 67% of Latino/a students are offered advanced courses during high school.

Parents' educational level also contributes to the reproduction of inequalities. Research shows that the parents of underrepresented students are less likely to hold a college degree, and therefore have less access to the social and cultural capital needed to support their children in the process of selecting a postsecondary institution as well as entering and navigating higher education (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Cabrera et al., 2006; Chandler, Slate, Moore & Barnes, 2014; Dumais & Ward, 2009; Fann, Jarsky & McDonough, 2009; Kena et al., 2015). In sum, the inequalities discussed here clearly have a negative impact on the academic preparedness and, in a broader sense, the college readiness of minoritized students.

In an attempt to minimize the achievement gap and improve college and career readiness among students in U.S. public schools, several federal and state legislations have been created (Barnes et al., 2010; Chandler et al., 2014). At the federal level, the No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 is an example of legislation created with the discourse of promoting equity in education for all students in the American public school system. When first implemented, the NCLB Act focused on grades 3 to 8 but soon later it was expanded to secondary schools. At the secondary level, standardized tests were used to test students in the areas of reading, mathematics, and science at least once in 10th, 11th, or 12th grade (Barnes et al., 2010). Although

perhaps well-intended, the NCLB Act ended up harming educators and students for its unrealistic goals, high-stakes testing, and punitive accountability measures for schools that did not meet benchmarks (Chandler et al., 2014).

In a study to examine the effect of NCLB on elementary teachers' writing instruction, McCarthy (2008) found that low-income and language minoritized students suffered the most harm. Pressured to meet the standards, teachers in low income schools, which had a great number of language minoritized students, were compelled to adopt "teaching-to-test" methods for "training" students in the areas of math and reading. Consequently, there was little time invested in developing students' writing abilities. Additionally, there was little to no room for developing students' creativity and critical thinking ability. During the time of my data collection at Southwest High School, in spring 2014, all of the participants in this study had already passed their exit-level Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), therefore the participant English teachers reported having more autonomy in decision-making regarding senior-level English curriculum. Despite having passed the exit-level TAKS prior to the beginning of this study, the participant students reported feeling that the writing instruction they received in high school was comprised by TAKS preparation.

Having explained what college readiness entails and how standardized measures of cognitive skills negatively impacts low income and underrepresented students, in the next section I present some of the most relevant studies on ethnically and linguistically minoritized students' transitions to postsecondary institutions.

Studies on minoritized students' transitions to college.

As showed in the previous section, the literature on college readiness has traditionally focused on cognitive aspects of academic preparation. Thus, in this chapter I draw on literature

that examines minoritized students' transitions to college through sociocultural perspectives on learning, literacy, and identities.

Adopting a social practice perspective on literacy, Harklau (2001) conducted a year-long ethnographic study to examine four female language minoritized students' perspectives on academic literacy practices as they transitioned from high school to college. Three of the research participants were Vietnamese Americans, while one participant was Turkish American. The four students, who had migrated to the U.S. between 6-10 years prior to the study, were enrolled in an academically rigorous science-technology high school program. The magnet school then was the initial site of data collection which included observation of students across classes both in high school and college. The study revealed that participants found high school and college-level literacy practices to have similarities and differences. Similarities included the use of textbooks and multiple-choice tests. As for differences, the students cited note taking as significantly more demanding in college. The participants had difficulty with notetaking because in high school this was an occasional literacy practice and explicitly scaffolded by the teachers whereas in college this literacy practice was very frequent but not scaffolded. Additionally, one unexpected finding revealed that students felt that high school teachers placed more emphasis on writing competencies than college professors in their first-year college classes. For Harklau (2001), this unexpected, in particular, demonstrates how literacies, as situated practices, are not always predictable and therefore cannot be generalized. These findings have implications for college preparations programs grounded in cognitive perspectives on literacy as a transferable set of skills.

Similarly to Harklau (2001), Hungerford-Kresser (2010) also examined ethnically minoritized students' transitions to college through a sociocultural perspective; however, in this

study, academic literacies were investigated in relation to identities and case-study approach was used. Even though the five Latino/as in this study had been Hungerford-Kresser's students while participating in a college-readiness program during high school, her year-long study focused on students' academic literacies and identities constructions throughout their first year of college. Therefore, the research site was the postsecondary institution, specifically, a high-ranked, predominantly White four-year public university. Data collection tools included life history interviews with the students, and faculty, class observations, and artifacts such as documents as well as photographs taken by the participants. The photographs taken on the college campus were sources of data that reflected students' emerging identities as college students. Using the figured words theory to make sense of participants' literacies and identities in the academic context, Hungerford-Kresser's (2010) found evidences of the participants' emerging college identities. An example of that was students' incorporation of academic terminology into their linguistic repertoire. The researcher also found that, even though the students had participated in a college readiness program that addresses "predictable" challenges in college transition like time management and study skills, they still struggled with these aspects of academic literacies. Another finding suggested that the students struggled in negotiating their ethnically minoritized identities in the context of a predominantly White institution. Even though the students were critical of deficit discourses on ethnically minoritized students, the students, at times, reproduced those self-stigmatizing discourses. This finding illuminated how the interplay between literacy and power shaped participants' development as college students in that particular White, upper middle-class educational context.

Ruecker (2012), like Hungerford-Kresser, drew on sociocultural lenses and case-study approach to examine Latino/a students' academic literacies in their first year in college.

Ruecker's (2012) study, however, did not focus on identity-making and his research participants were seven first-generation Latino/a students who had graduated from a low income high school in the U.S.-Mexico border region. This study specially focused on the bilingual participants' engagement with college-level writing. Using Bourdieu's cultural capital theory combined with Yosso's community cultural wealth theory, Ruecker (2012) found that the students who were most successful transitioning to college were those who better assimilated to the dominant, English-monolingual culture of the educational institutions where they started their postsecondary studies. Another important finding was that the participants' development as academic writers had been deeply impacted by the No Child Left Behind Act and its high-stakes testing agenda, which affected the amount of time invested in writing instruction in the low income high school the students had graduated from. Besides challenges related to academic writing, this study also highlighted struggles linked to being low income, first-generation college students. The need to contribute to their household income and other family obligations such as caring for younger siblings were part of Rucker's participants' struggles in balancing school and out-of-school responsibilities.

These challenges faced by the participants' in Ruecker's (2012) study are common to many other first generation college students. In a study to investigate the ethnically minoritized students' academic experiences in Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), Merisotis and McCarthy (2005) found that these students were more likely to be first-generations and come from lower income families. The authors stress that, even though MSIs offer advantages such as more affordable tuition fees and various types of mentoring programs, first-generation students struggle in balancing their studies, work, and family responsibilities. In examining the experiences of Latina first-generation college students' in coping with family expectations and

academic responsibilities, Gloria and Castellanos (2012) found that the participants felt privileged and proud for being the first in their families to pursue higher education. Nonetheless, they also stressed the pressure of meeting family and academic expectations. In spite of such challenges, families have been identified as important support systems for Latino/a first-generation college students (Gloria & Catellanos, 2012; Ong, Phinney & Dennis, 2006).

To conclude this section, this dissertation study contributes to the body of research on ethnically minoritized students' transitions from high school to college by examining the topic from a sociocultural framework and an ethnographic lens. Both Harklau's ethnographic (2001) study and Ruecker's longitudinal case-study (2012) examined ethnically minoritized students' literacies across the spaces of high school, a four-year university and a two-year college; however, they did not look at how identities shape and are shaped through engagement with the multimodal literacies inside and outside of formal educational settings. Hungerford-Kresser (2010) examined Latino/a students' identity-making through literacy practices; however, because her study focused on students' first year of college, it did not provide a clear picture of students' academic preparation in their high school. Additionally, her research participants had participated in a college readiness program throughout their four years of high school. Also, the students in her study were admitted into a prestigious predominantly White university, thus the context of the study led to findings involving race and class tensions. Thus, my dissertation study attempts to contribute to research on minoritized students' transitions to college by focusing on how Latino/a students in the borderland negotiate their multiliterate practices and identities across the spaces – high school, a two-year and a four-year institution – over the course of a year.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the theoretical framework of this study which is formed by three sociocultural theories that take into account the intersections among literacies, identities, and power: the NLS, Gee's Discourses theory, and the figured worlds theory. After discussing these theories in the light of empirical studies on youth's literacy practices and also highlighting the gap between in and out-of-school literacies, I drew on the literature on academic preparedness and college readiness to illuminate the inequalities in the K-16 educational system that hinder minoritized students' access to and success in higher education. To illustrate the challenges faced by ethnically minoritized students, who most often are first-generation students from low income families, I presented some empirical studies on their transitions to college. In the next chapter, I will proceed by explaining in details the methodology used for the completion of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Methods

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the methods I used to explore the literacy practices and identities of Latino/a youth in their transitions from high school to college. In what follows, I describe my methodological framework by first explaining my choice for a qualitative research design, and then justifying my choice for the ethnographic case-study approach. Following that, I provide details on the context of the study, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Methodological Framework

Justifying my choice of methodological framework requires consideration of the research question that drove this study. The overarching question guiding this study was:

-How do Latino/a youth construct and negotiate literacies and identities in their transitions from high school to college?

My choice for a qualitative research design relates to the interpretive nature of my research question. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) highlight, qualitative researchers generally seek answers to *how* questions to shed light on the meanings of social phenomena occurring in a given context. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) point out five main characteristics of qualitative research. First, it is essentially naturalistic which means that the researcher is interested in understanding how phenomena occur in natural settings. In contrast with quantitative approaches, which involve manipulation of variables, in qualitative research the natural setting or context where phenomena is observed is key to understanding how meanings are constructed and negotiated. Second, qualitative research uses descriptive data such as interview transcripts, fieldnotes and official documents. Different sources of descriptive data help researcher to have a

clearer understanding of the phenomena under examination. Third, qualitative researchers are concerned with the process leading to a certain outcome. Focusing on a process allows researchers to unveil attitudes and intentions that generate outcomes which are usually seen as common sense and therefore taken for granted. Fourth, qualitative research is inductive. Rather than testing theories like in quantitative inquiry, qualitative analysis is a reflective process in which the researcher, motivated by her intuitions, relies on different sources of data to be able to theorize about the topic under investigation.

Finally, participants' meanings are at the heart of qualitative research. Thus, one of the main concerns of a qualitative researcher is to ensure that her theorization about phenomena derives from a fair interpretation of participants' perspectives. In this sense, rather than pursuing universal "truths" when conducting this study, I was concerned about understanding participants' behaviors and their complexities; therefore, when carrying out this study and analyzing data, I not only looked for patterns and convergences in data, but also was equally attentive to inconsistencies and contradictions which are essential aspects of human behavior. With the complexities of human behavior in mind, qualitative researchers make use of data triangulation with the purpose of "constructing plausible explanations" for what is observed (Mathison, 1988). Mathison (1988) goes on to say that "whether the data converge, are inconsistent, or are contradictory the researcher must attempt to construct explanations for the data and about data" (p. 15).

Merriam (2002) argues that data triangulation is crucial in producing "good qualitative research." Even though the term "good" is relative, the author explains, the notion of "good qualitative research" refers to "Whether the study was conducted in a rigorous, systematic, and ethical manner, such that the results can be trusted" (Merriam, 2002, p. 24). In this study, validity

or trustworthiness was ensured by the use of data triangulation techniques such as the analysis of multiple sources of data, member-checks, peer-review, and reflexivity. The multiple sources of data included interviews with participant-students, high school teachers, and college professors; class observations and field notes; memos; artifacts such as school documents, photographs taken by me and by the participants, and participants' formal and informal writing samples. Member-checks occurred both during and after my fieldwork. During data collection I frequently turned to participants to verify information gathered through observations (class observations as well as observations of their web-mediated literacy practices). After my data collection, when I delved deeper into data analysis, I conducted member-checks by sharing two of my writing pieces with the participants': my short descriptions of the participants and their families, which appear in chapter 4; and my interpretations of their academic trajectories from high school to college, which appear at the end of chapter 6. As for the use of peer-review for triangulation, the guidance of my dissertation chair was vital in opening my eyes to multiple perspectives and interpretations. Finally, reflexivity was an ongoing process which is described in details later in this chapter.

Ethnographic case study.

Among the different approaches to qualitative inquiry, I found ethnographic case study approach to be the most appropriate avenue to address my research questions and convey my research findings. When I wrote the proposal for this study, I already envisioned it to become an ethnographic case study; nonetheless, I preferred to limit myself to calling it a case study because I was aware that ethnographic work, perhaps much more than any other research approach, largely depends on building strong relationships based on mutual trust and, before my data collection actually started, I doubted whether that would be possible considering the various

aspects that positioned me as an outsider to the community I intended to study. Thus, before data collection, the only certainty I had was that the research I was proposing was aligned with the case study approach for a few reasons. First, a case study seeks for answers to “why” and “how” questions regarding “contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 1). The phenomenon under investigation is a “bounded system”, that is, a unit of analysis or “case” which is bounded by space and/or time (Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1994; Creswell, 2013). In this sense, a case study can focus on examining an individual, group, political organization, a school, or a classroom within a school, over a certain period of time.

Yin (2003) highlights that the unit of analysis or “case” under investigation is identifiable in the research question proposed by the researcher. The unit of analysis as well as the research questions may change as the researcher plans and carries out the study. In this study, for example, my “how” question focused on bilingual Latino/a students’ literacies and identities as they transitioned from high school to college. My research question, then, clearly stated my unit of analysis – I was looking at college-bound, bilingual Latino/a students. The clarity of my unit of analysis was important as it guided the process of participant recruitment through purposive sampling, a strategy commonly used in case study for “achieving the greatest understanding of phenomena” (Stake, 1994, p. 450).

It is important to point out that, rather than a multiple-case study design, I opted for a single-case study approach. Yin (2003) points out that researchers who choose the single-case design may be criticized for putting “all their eggs in a basket,” therefore, they must be careful so as to not just focus on the description and analysis of the patterns that bind the case, but pay equal attention to distinctive aspects within the case. As previously mentioned, the single unit of analysis for this study was bilingual Latino/a, college-bound students. After I had recruited the

participants, I noticed that there was one more aspect binding the case: all of the participants were first-generation college students. This aspect certainly impacted the participants' first semester of college in similar ways. In other words, because these students were the first in their families to attend college, I found consistent patterns in the types of challenges they faced upon entering the world of higher education. Those challenges resonate with existing literature on first-generation college students. I found this to be a strong argument for justifying my choice for single-case study; however, throughout my data collection and analysis, I paid equal attention to aspects that made each student's transition to college unique. Another reason that guided my choice for a single case study is that I decided to combine it with ethnographic approach. As I will discuss more in details later, ethnography focuses on a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013).

To understand and explain social phenomenon – in this case, the literacies and identities of bilingual Mexican American, first-generation college students, I did what case study researchers typically do: I relied on ethnographic methods of data collection. Specifically, drawing on different data sources such as observations, interviews, and document analysis, the researcher tries to convey, through “thick description”, the complexities of human experience in a particular context (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Because of their focus on human activity in a particular context, case study researchers grapple with the epistemological question “What can be learned about the single case?” (Stake, 1994, p. 443). Yin (2003) addresses the question of generalization by arguing that “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (p. 10). This statement implies that case study research is not at all concerned about enumerate frequencies like statisticians do. Instead, the case study researcher's goal is to expand and generalize theories. Stake (1994) warns against the

risks of generalization. He mentions that the urge to generalize and theorize can be so strong that it can hinder the analysis process as the researcher will tend to overlook important features of the case. If generalization is not necessarily the goal of case study, one may ask “What is the purpose of triangulation?” Stake (1994) provides the answer to this question within the qualitative research realm. He states, “Triangulation serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case is being seeing” (Stake, 1994, p. 454).

Having explained my choice for single-case study approach, I now provide a rationale for adopting an ethnographic lens to examine participants’ academic trajectories and identities from high school to college. The combination of these two research approaches is not uncommon in qualitative research. Because case study focuses on a unit of analysis, a bounded system, it allows for a number of strategies to be combined with the case. Ethnography is, in fact, the most common approach coupled with case study (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Merriam, 2002). Creswell (2013) differentiates case study from ethnography by stating that the focus of the latter “is on setting individuals’ stories within the context of their culture and culture-sharing group” (p.102). Ethnography, then, is concerned with understanding the culture through its group members’ perspectives, also taking into account the influence of the larger social structure on local practices. For this reason, ethnography offers a much broader view of the culture than case studies (Creswell, 2013; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; O’Reilly, 2012).

A key question that arises in explaining the work of ethnographers is “what is culture?” Street and Heath (2008) suggest that ethnographers look at culture as a verb rather than a noun. This implies shifting the focus from what culture *is* to what culture *does*. As Cole (2010) puts it, culture is “history in the present” – it is “symbolic and materially constituted social inheritance, embodied in language and social practices” (p. 462). This view of culture as a fluid and dynamic

sociohistorical process seems very appropriate, particularly if we consider how societies have changed around the globe mainly as a result of advancements in technology and intensified migration. These rapid changes, Street and Heath (2008) highlight, have put multilingualism and multimodality in the forefront of daily social exchanges, making the concept of culture even harder to grasp. In this way, even though members of a local community share “patterns of behavior and beliefs that persist over time that remain over time” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010), their culture is never fixed – it is shaped by the members of the group themselves as well as by the larger social context.

Perhaps because the notion of culture is difficult to grasp, the sociologist and ethnographer Karen O’Reilly (2012) prefers to draw on the notion of social practice to explain the work of ethnographers. She writes, “Ethnography should be informed by a theory of practice that: understands social life as the outcome of interaction of structure and agency through the practice of everyday life” (O’Reilly, 2012, p.11). In the field of education, ethnographers typically draw on sociocultural theories to understand how language and literacy develop through social practice. Street and Heath (2008) identify three main situations of learning that education ethnographers choose so as to examine language and literacy as social practices: individuals striving to become experts in something; groups in identity making; institutions of formal education. This study encompasses these three learning situations identified by Street and Heath (2008): drawing on of sociocultural theories of literacy and identities as social practice, I examine a culture-sharing group of students in the process of learning the practices of a new cultural world –the university. Even though the study focuses on literacies and identity constructions across formal education institutions, I try to paint a broader picture of who these

students' are by looking at out-of-school factors that have helped to shape their multiliterate identities and expectations for the future.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, before starting this study I limited myself to calling it a case study built by drawing on ethnographic data collection tools. As the study progressed and data analysis became more intense, I felt confident enough to call it an ethnography, mainly because of the relationships built during my fieldwork. Throughout the twelve-month data collection period, mutual trust with participants was enabled through online and face-to-face communications that occurred in and out of the high school and college classrooms – cafeterias, computer labs, and libraries were some of the spaces the participants and I at Southwest High School, I had many opportunities to have informal conversations with the participants. Most often, these conversations took place in the school library and in the school cafeteria, whenever the participants had some free time in-between classes or at the end of the school day. Clifford Geertz (1998) coined the term “deep hanging out” in reference to a form of participatory observation that takes place either physically or virtually. Hanging out with participants, explains Geertz (1998), is a way for anthropologists to immerse themselves in a cultural group on an informal level. In this study, hanging out with the participants, either face-to-face or in social media, was a means to get to know participants better and understand the goals and beliefs that drove their actions.

In the second phase of data collection, I had fewer chances to hang out with the participants because of their different class and work schedules. Because I had to be at BU more often, I had more chances to meet Julie, Natalia, and Nina than the participants at CC. Whenever I met these students, I would either help them with assignments or simply hang out and talk about random topics such as family, work, music, and so on. I also had the opportunity to have

informal conversations with Julie and Nadia in different occasions where I offered each of them a ride to work and home.

At CC, I only hung out with Nadia, Ana and Juan on three occasions, and with Cecilia and Ana twice inside the cafeteria. Social media and texting were also key tools for solidifying relationships with the participants. These interactions with the participants, their openness in sharing their academic and life concerns with me gave me the confidence to write up my research findings as an ethnographic study. In sum, these relationships based on trust enabled me with different opportunities to understand their multiple perspectives, which in turn, helped me to paint a broader and more accurate picture of participants' realities (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; O'Reilly, 2012) as well as the reasons that motivated their actions (Geertz, 1998). The issues of reflexivity and representation, which are central to ethnographic studies, are discussed in the next section.

Locating Myself in this Study: Reflexivity

A reflexive ethnography, rather than presenting a detached voice of authority, should honestly locate the ethnographer in his or her own study, in an admission that all observations and interpretations are filtered through our own experiences (O'Reilly, 2012, p.223).

Thanks to the efforts of poststructuralist, feminist and indigenous scholars, reflexivity is increasingly gaining recognition as an essential component of the qualitative research paradigm (O'Reilly, 2012; Glesne, 2010). These scholars, Glesne (2010) notes, see reflexivity as a means to challenge research following the positivist tradition which praises the researcher's detachment from his or her work in the name of "objectivity." In fact, poststructuralists see neutrality in

research as a way to “reproduce a colonizing discourse of the ‘Other’” (Fine, 1994). In her book titled *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Māori Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes how she witnessed her people being researched through the “imperial eyes” of positivists with their supposedly neutral methodologies. Smith (2012) argues that colonialism and imperialism have positioned Western societies, particularly European nations, as the “standard model of comparison” (p. 44). Consequently, whoever does not “fit in” the dominant paradigm is the “Other” or “deviant.” This “standard model of comparison” has historically determined what counts as knowledge, as well as how knowledge should be produced and disseminated. Thus, even though this model is based on White male middle class knowledge, it has been accepted as the neutral or unbiased way of doing research. This explains why research often portray minority groups, the “Other” and “deviant”, through deficit perspectives. Determined to contribute to a shift in the way research has been traditionally done in indigenous communities, Smith (2012) encourages the “researched” to take on the role of “researcher” in their own communities. The author, however, highlights that even the case of indigenous ethnographers researching in their own communities, reflexivity is crucial because power relations are always uneven in research.

In “The colonizer/colonized Chicana ethnographer,” the Latina researcher Sofia Villenas (1996) also shared an experience in which she witnessed her people being researched through the colonizer perspective which positioned Latino/as a “problem.” In this case, however, Villenas (1996) was part of the research team and this led her to seriously question her positionality – at the same time she identified herself with community members, the “colonized,” for being Latino/a, Chicana, and Spanish speaker, she also shared characteristics with the “colonizer” for being an educated woman, a researcher trained at a predominantly White institution, and English speaker. Caught up between two worlds – the one of the outsider/colonizer and the one of the

insider/colonized, Villenas (1996) learned the importance of reflexivity as a means to understand her positionality, that is, the “dynamic and changing aspects of [her] identity” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 30). In doing so, the scholar was able to resist “Othering” in her own research.

In conducting and writing this study, I also grappled with multiple identities that at times positioned me as the “colonized,” or insider to the marginalized group I was studying, and other times as the “colonizer”/outsider. As a Latina and, like some of my research participants, an immigrant and speaker of English as a Second Language, I was positioned as an insider to the community I was studying. In Smith’s (2012) and Villena’s (1996) terms, I was the “native colonized,” doing research with my own marginalized community in the context of the “imperialist” U.S. Thus, even though I was born in Brazil, my experiences were somehow linked to my Mexican and Mexican American participants as all of us, literally or metaphorically, have experienced the “third world” – some of my participants were born and lived in Mexico for the first years of their lives; others were born in the U.S. but still experience “third-world”-type of marginalization for being of Mexican-heritage, Spanish speakers, living in an impoverished city along the U.S.-Mexico border.

It is important to emphasize two factors that, combined, possibly intensify participants’ marginalization in the U.S, making their experiences very different from mine: being of Mexican heritage and living on the U.S.-Mexico border. As we see in U.S. politics and the media, Mexicans are one the most stigmatized minority groups in this country. Additionally, the media portrayal of the U.S.-Mexico border is most of the times limited to poverty and violence issues. Moreover, Mexican and Mexican Americans in the borderlands are stigmatized for their varieties of Spanish and English such as the “Tex-Mex.” As the feminist Chicana scholar Anzaldúa (1987) so well described, the borderland is a unique space of in-betweenness - of dualities and

contradictions, marginalization and resistance. In writing about the importance of reflexivity, Fine (1994) also addresses the tensions of being *in-between*. In this case, the author is not referring to the physical space of the borderland. Rather, she is encouraging researcher to reflect on what is “happening between” the “I” and the “Other”, the researcher and her participants. This is what I have tried to accomplish so far by examining my multiple identities in comparison and contrast to my study’s participants.

Besides their Mexican heritage, another point of contrast between participants’ identities and mine is the age factor. As I was examining the literacies and identities of a group of adolescents, I had to be very careful to not reproduce adolescent myths by possibly overlooking nuances in my data. As scholars have stressed youth’s culture and identities are often presented as homogenous and research has contributed to the perpetuation of existing frameworks that portray youngsters as wild/troubled (Moje, 2002), irrational, deviant and apathetic (Wortham, 2011; Bartlett, López, Mein & Valdiviezo, 2011). There is also a widespread notion that all adolescents are “tech savvy” (Moje, 2002). Aware of those generalizing discourses, throughout my data collection and analysis I was very careful in describing participants’ literacies and identities, which proved to be very heterogeneous and nuanced.

To conclude this section, it is important to acknowledge that the power relations embedded in research are always uneven. Even though reflexivity is useful in producing more socially just research as the researcher becomes aware of her own bias, reflexivity in itself does not change the fact that the author is in control of the end product. In this study, data triangulation and reflexivity helped me to better understand participants’ perspectives; nonetheless, in the process of data analysis, their perspectives were “filtered through [my] own experiences”, as O’Reilly (2012) notes.

Research Context

The borderland community.

This study was conducted in the southwest region of the nearly 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border. Residents of this area are deeply affected by both visible and less visible aspects of the border (Staudt & Coronado, 2002). Among the visible aspects of the border are the \$2.8 billion border wall separating family members (Rice, 2011), the highly surveilled crossing points where long lines of vehicles are formed as U.S. authorities question Mexican citizens entering this country; the socioeconomic inequalities characterizing the “first world” and the “third world” countries; the violence of drug cartels which has caused a great number of Mexican residents to flee to one of the safest cities in the world on the U.S side of the border (de la Piedra & Araujo, 2012).

While the physical aspects of the border are clearly spaces of difference, less visible yet very real aspects connect these two worlds – the intersections between languages and cultures. This space of in-betweenness is by no means unproblematic. As the borderlands Chicana scholar Anzaldúa (1987) highlights, this is a space of multiple linguistic and cultural identities which are in constant tension; nonetheless, this site where hybrid identities often collide is also the source of a new consciousness – a space where dualistic paradigms regarding gender, culture, ethnicity, and languages are broken down, thus generating new meanings (Anzaldúa, 1987).

According to the U.S Census Bureau, the border city where this study was conducted has approximately 679,030 residents - about 80% of them are considered Hispanic/Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Education and low wages are two of the biggest economic issues in this border city. Only 74 % of the residents ages 25 and older have a high school degree or the equivalent, compared to the national average of 85%. Additionally, only 20.7% of the residents

ages 25 and older hold a Bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income between the years 2009-2013 was approximately \$41,406, and about 23.3% of the city's population are below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Southwest High School (SHS).

The first phase of the study, from January 2014 to June 2014, took place at Southwest High School (SHS), labeled as a Title I school. Title I is the largest federally funded program, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Every year it provides funding to school systems across the country for students "at risk" of failure and living at or close to poverty level. SHS is one out of the two high school serving youth in its district. According to the Texas Education Agency website, in the 2011-2012 academic year there were over 1,500 students enrolled, 94.5% of which were Latinos. Additionally, among the entire school population, over 70% were classified as economically disadvantaged, and approximately 51% were deemed "at risk." In the area of English Language Arts, only 37% of the students were considered college-ready graduates in the 2011-2012 academic year. Also, based on the 2012 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status, which measures student performance and participation of statewide assessments, the district was subject to School Improvement Program (SIP) requirements for Stage 1 during the 2012-2013 school year.

When I started collecting data at SHS, many staff and faculty members, including the principal and the two teachers participating in this study, were new to the school. Some of the new staff was hired to replace members of the previous administration who were under investigation by the Texas Education Agency for allegedly manipulating school demographic data that could potentially harm the school's AYP rating. According to a TEA report on this case, the former principal had been involved in the manipulation of the Limited English

Proficiency (LEP) subgroup as well as manipulation of students' grade classifications. It seems that the former administration masked the real numbers on LEP so as to avoid facing accountability, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, and its possible consequences in case the students did not meet AYP. Additionally, according to the TEA report, "many mid-year grade classifications were made to promote 10th graders to 11th graders resulting in the avoidance of the 10th grade accountability year" (TEA xxxx ISD report, 2012, p. 5). In what follows, I explain the second phase of this study, which took place at two Hispanic-serving institutions where the participants started their postsecondary studies.

The Community College (CC).

Perhaps because of its open-door admission policy and lower tuition fees (three times lower than BU), the local Community College attracted most of the students in this particular borderland region (*CC Fact Book*, 2013). As of 2012, the community college enrollment was at 30,394 students, 84.7% of which were Latino/as. Among the Latino/a students attending CC in 2012, 86.2% were considered first-generation college students. As many of the postsecondary students in this low-income region need to work to help support their families, full-time enrollment at CC was low – approximately 35 percent (*CC Fact Book*, 2013). CC offered a total of 130 programs where students may earn an Associate of Arts, Associate of Applied Science, Associate of Arts in Teaching, and Associate of Science degrees, or certificates of completion. The classes were offered across CC's five campuses, one of them – Heritage campus (pseudonym) - was located right across Southwest High School. Four of the participants in this study started their postsecondary education at CC's Heritage campus. The other three participants attended the Borderland University.

Borderland University (BU).

According to the Borderland University Facts Report (2013), in fall 2012 the total enrollment reached over 22,000 students, with approximately 83% of them coming from the county where the institution is located. An additional 8% of students were from Mexico. Nearly 55% of BU's student population were the first in their families to attend college and one-third of these students reported a family income of \$20,000 or less. Latinos comprised 77.38% of the university enrollment in fall 2012. Approximately 60% of BU students were full-timers while the remaining 40% attended school part-time most likely for holding either full-time or part-time jobs (*BU Fact Book*, 2013).

In the fall 2014 semester, BU, for the third consecutive year, had been ranked #1 among all U.S. universities in *Washington Monthly's* social mobility category, which measures universities' success in outperforming predictions for the graduation of first-generation and low-income students. The *Washington Monthly* magazine's social mobility category was built on factors such as lowest "net price" (out-of-pocket cost), employment status after graduation, the number of years needed for a graduate to recover money invested in tuition and fees, and financial return for educational investments within five years in the workforce (*BU Economic and Community Impact*, 2014).

Negotiating Access

This study took one year to be completed and was divided into two phases. The first phase of data collection took place at Southwest High School, where I recruited the participants. The second phase took place at the two Hispanic-serving institutions where the participants started their postsecondary studies: the Community College and the Borderland University. Conducting the first phase of this study at SHS was a circumstantial decision. I had initially

considered collecting data in one of the high school within the largest school district in the area; however, I did not do so because this school district was facing serious legal accusations such as keeping low-performing students out of classrooms by improperly holding some back, accelerating others, and preventing many from showing up for the tests or enrolling in school. Because of this cheating scandal, the school district was not granting permission for research to be conducted in its schools. SHS then seemed a good option for this study as it is located in one of the smallest school district in the area and has a very large number of Latino/a students, many of them from low-income families. Additionally, even though SHS was also involved in cheating scandals, the principal and the participating teachers, who were new to the school, were very welcoming to researchers.

During my first meeting with the principal, in November 2013, he expressed great willingness to assist me with anything I needed for advancing my research and was hopeful that, once completed, my study could point to ways to improve students' academic literacies. In January 2014, the principal then introduced me to the head of the English Department, Ms. Rodriguez, to whom I explained my research goals. Ms. Rodriguez suggested that I contact the two teachers responsible for all on-level senior English classes in the school – Ms. Garcia and Ms. Martinez. After e-mailing the teachers, I met with them in person. I explained to them that, despite my interest in literacy practices across disciplines, participant-observations in English classes, specifically, were likely to provide me with more opportunities to document students' engagement with the reading and writing of different types of texts. I also told the teachers that I would be happy to help them by revising students' written assignments and providing writing tutoring if they needed. The teachers liked the idea and, from the start, they were very welcoming and did not hesitate in giving me consent to observe and participate in their classes as

appropriate. *Confianza* or mutual trust (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1992; Moll et al. 1994), however, was fostered over time through daily interactions in and out of class time.

Participants

On January 21, 2014, I started my data collection in two senior-level English classes, one taught by Ms. Garcia and the other taught by Ms. Martinez. On that same day, I introduced myself to the students. I explained that I was a Ph.D. student conducting research on students' engagement with reading and writing in their transitions from high school to college. It was not until mid-March that I started to recruit participants. My reason to wait over a month to start recruitment was that I found it important to get to know the students and establish *confianza*. Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) argue that *confianza* or mutual trust is established through reciprocity and respect. Thus, before recruiting participants, I tried to foster *confianza* by helping students develop classroom assignments, revising scholarship essays, and providing information about college and financial aid. Whenever the students brought up college-related questions that I did not know the answer, I either did research on my own or, together with the students, used the school library computers to search for answers to their questions. On one occasion, one of the students asked me a question regarding financial aid, as I did not know the answer, I offered to go to the Community College (located right across SHS) with her to obtain the information that she needed. These are examples of how *confianza* was continuously fostered before participant recruitment.

Because I was interested in examining students' negotiations of language, literacies and identities in their transitions from high school to college, by mid-March I started to recruit students who (1) considered their first language to be either Spanish or both Spanish and English; and (2) planned to enroll at either of the two major postsecondary institutions in El Paso

in fall 2014. I was able to identify potential participants by explaining my research and my participant selection criteria during one of Ms. Martinez's and Ms. Garcia's class. Following that, I invited the potential participants to hear more details about my research out of class time. Finally, 14 students provided formal consent to participate in the study. The initial number of participants slowly dropped to 7, as some students did not enroll in college right after high school. Two students decided to attend higher education institutions other than BU and CC. All of the participants were between 17-18 years old when they were recruited, therefore I requested their parents' or legal guardians' consent. The consent forms were available in English and in Spanish. All of the participants were of Mexican heritage and considered themselves bilinguals. They were the first in their families to attend college. Table 3.1 presents some information on the seven participants.

Table 3.1

Research Participants

Pseudonyms	Educational Background	Family Composition
Ana	-Born and educated in the U.S.	-Lived with her grandmother and her older sibling -Had a younger sibling living with her aunt -Parents were divorced
Cecilia	-Born and educated in the U.S.	-Lived with her mother and two younger siblings
Juan	-Born in Mexico - Educated in U.S. schools since pre-K -Immigrated to the -U.S. at age 12	-Lived with his mother, step-father, and a younger sibling

Julie	-Born and educated in the U.S.	-Lived with her grandparents -Her older sister was married -Her two younger siblings lived with her mother -Her father was deported to Mexico
Nadia	-Born and educated in the U.S.	-Lived with her parents and three younger siblings
Natalia	-Born in Mexico -Immigrated to the U.S. at age 5	-Lived with her parents and two siblings
Nina	-Born and educated in the U.S.	-Lived with her parents and two siblings

Even though all the participants in this study shared similarities - lived in a marginalized area of the U.S.-Mexico border, attended a low income school, and were the first in their families to go to college, there were factors that shaped their life and educational trajectories differently. Socioeconomic status, immigration status, and family dynamics were key aspects shaping participants' beliefs about education and their motivations to pursue a postsecondary degree, therefore these aspects of their identities will be briefly discussed here. In what follows, I provide short descriptions of participants' families.

Natalia and Juan: First-generation immigrants.

Both Juan and Natalia were first-generation immigrants; nevertheless, there are nuances in their life trajectories across two countries. Although Juan only moved to the U.S. when he was 12 years old, his entire schooling was done in monolingual English classes in the United States. From Pre-K to middle-school, Juan would cross the U.S.-Mexico border every day to attend school here. Juan's family did not seem to struggle financially. After having worked in a daycare and being able to establish strong networks with kids' parents, Juan's mother opened her own

daycare. Juan's parents were divorced and he lived with his mother, but he reported having a close relationship with both of his parents. The young Latino/a shared that his mother and his cousin, who is a school principal, had influenced his opinions about the importance of education.

Natalia came to the U.S. at the age of five and received bilingual instruction throughout elementary school. The young Latina did not seem to have a very close relationship with her family. In one of our interviews, Natalia mentioned that she wished her parents expressed more their feelings, especially their excitement towards her going to college. Additionally, her family seemed to struggle financially. As in one occasion I gave Natalia a ride from college to home, I witnessed her humble living conditions. Her mother was a housekeeper at one hotel and her dad took care of horses in a ranch in New Mexico. He would be out of town for a month because of his job.

Nadia: Second-generation immigrant.

Nadia was a second-generation immigrant in the U.S. In our interviews and informal conversations, Nadia often talked about how privileged she felt for being able to go to college because of the sacrifices her immigrant parents had made. She explained that her parents struggled financially when she was a child but they were able to gain stability as her father opened his own roofing business. For Nadia, her greatest inspirations to pursue higher education were her mother and her grandmother, who she described as very strong and hardworking women. Nadia's grandmother had a *tiendita* (small store) in Mexico where she sold candies, coke, and snacks. Influenced by her grandmother who helped to raise her, Nadia wanted to become a businesswoman. Nadia's close relationship to her family was evident in her talk and Facebook posts.

Nina, Ana, Cecilia, and Julie: Over two generations in the U.S.

Like Juan and Nadia, Nina's family also run their own business. Nina's father had a construction company and, among all participants, her family seemed to be the most economically advantaged. Nina reported having a very close connection to her family who had high expectations for her future. On Instagram, Nina would sometimes post pictures of family trips across the U.S. Ana, Cecilia, and Julie faced more financial struggles and also had different family dynamics.

Ana was raised by her mother and grandmother because her parents were divorced. In the interviews and informal conversations, Ana expressed her deep resentment towards her father who hardly provided any financial support for her throughout her life. Ana became even more upset with her father and his side of the family after her high school graduation ceremony to which they had been invited by her but did not attend. The student reported feeling that her father and his family did not care for her at all, therefore she hardly ever communicated with them. On the other hand, Ana reported feeling well supported by her mother and grandmother to pursue her academic goals. She described her mother as someone who was very smart but did not have many opportunities in life. Ana also told me that her mother planned to go to college and asked Ana's help with the application process. Ana then replied to her mother, "I will help you. I will help you to go throughout the process and everything but you need to be committed" (Ana, individual interview, 02/12/2015). Ana's mother had remarried and, as the young Latina did not get along with her stepfather, she was living with her grandmother. According to Ana, her mother had lost custody of her younger brother because of some family problems. These family issues seemed to have a great impact on Ana who was considering pursuing a degree in Social Work in order to deal with matters like the ones her own family was going through. Ana also

wanted to get custody of her brother but she was not financially stable to do that on her own, as she told me.

Cecilia had been raised by her mother for the most part of her life. Her father passed away when she was approximately 5 years old. Cecilia told me that her family received financial assistance from the government and, at one point during college, she had to start working full time to help her family. Cecilia lost one of her sisters to a car accident during high school. This incident brought her family closer, as she told me. No one in Cecilia's immediate or extended family had attended college; however, her mother was very supportive of her educational goals. Looking up information on scholarships was one of the ways Cecilia's mother found to support her daughter's college aspirations.

Finally, Julie's family history is the most complex among all of the participants. Julie's family moved from Texas to Santa Fe and she was raised there until she completed middle school. After that, Julie and her older sister moved to Texas to live with her grandparents. Her two younger siblings remained in Santa Fe with her mother who held a job as a caretaker. Julie's father was a Mexican immigrant who was living in the U.S. with false documents. After being incarcerated twice for drug dealing, he was finally deported to Mexico. Julie still communicated with her father. Regarding her academic goals, Julie told me that her mother never actually told her to pursue higher education. Rather, Julie's mother would tell her to do what she deemed best for her. In spite of not having much support for her educational goals, Julie told me that her family was happy about her decision to go to college.

Data Sources and Data Collection Procedures

Individual interviews.

O'Reilly (2012) argues that ethnographers are able to gather a substantial amount data just by listening and asking questions while conducting participant-observations. Nevertheless, ethnographic interviews comprise one of the main sources of data because they are guided by a purpose (O'Reilly, 2012; Spradley, 1979). This is not to imply that interviews are a passive process where the researcher takes up an authoritarian role. In reality, ethnographic interviewing is a collaborative endeavor where the ethnographer “takes more control of the taking, directing it in those channels that lead to discovering the cultural knowledge of the informant” (Spradley, 1979, p. 59). O'Reilly (2012) highlights that there is no “normal” way of interviewing in ethnography; however, among a wide range of interviewing styles, ethnographers typically opt for more “flexible” approaches such as semi-structured or unstructured interviews. For this study, I found that semi-structured interviews were ideal for understanding students’ literacies and identities as a socio-historical process (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

I conducted three in-depth interviews with each of the participants (see appendixes A, B, and C for interview guides). Each of the interviews lasted approximately 1.5-2 hours and were audio-recorded. In an attempt to best capture participants’ meanings, I found it important to fully transcribe all of the interviews. I also found helpful to transcribe each round of interview as soon as I finished them. In doing so, I was able to have a clearer idea about relevant topics that needed further exploration in the upcoming interviews. The first interviews, conducted at SHS at the end of students’ senior year, aimed to explore participants’ literacy histories as well as their college plans. The second interviews were conducted took place at CC and BU, when participants were halfway through their first semester in college. These interviews mainly explored participants’

impressions of and experiences with college-level literacies. The last interview occurred after participants' had completed their first semester in college. In these interviews, the participants reflected on their academic trajectories and identity constructions from high school to higher education.

I also conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with Ms. Martinez and Ms. Garcia (see appendix E), the two English teachers from Southwest High school. In college, I interviewed participants' First Year Composition instructors (see appendix F). The interviews with educators focused on pedagogical practices as well as the challenges they faced in their teaching. Their accounts contributed to a broader understanding of the research contexts.

Focus-group interviews.

In the beginning of the fall 2014 semester, I conducted one focus group interview with the participants enrolled at CC and one with the participants attending BU (see appendix D for interview guide). Focus group interviews may serve different purposes and, as with many other types of data collection tools, they have advantages and disadvantages (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Morgan, 2002; O'Reilly, 2012). One of the advantages of focus groups interviews is that the exchange of ideas, often times conflicting ideas, stimulate collective and deeper reflection on a given topic. As O'Reilly (2012) puts it, through focus groups interviews "people make sense of their world in interaction" (p.135). Even though focus group interviewing can stimulate talk and reflection, thus producing rich data, it can be challenging. For this type of interview, the researcher must be skillful in moderating interactions so as to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to talk (Morgan, 2002) as well as express their honest opinions and disagreements (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; O'Reilly, 2012). Furthermore, during focus groups interviews, participants can easily wander off the point (O'Reilly, 2012).

For this study, focus groups interviews clear advantages as they had purpose to explore participants' first impressions of college. Because the students were entering a new cultural world, they had many things to share. Another factor that contributed to the success of the focus group was that the participants had all been friends for at least their four years of high school. Thus, it seemed that the students saw the focus group as an opportunity to "catch up" with one another as they no longer met on a daily basis like in high school. Another positive aspect was that the students were already used to interacting with me, therefore they did not feel intimidated during the interview. My only challenge was to moderate interactions when the students either got too eager to answer my questions or too excited about being with their friends. Whenever overlapping talk occurred, I politely asked them to wait for their turn to speak. Each of the focus group interview lasted approximately two hours but, after both of them ended, the students lingered around and we continued talking for at least one more hour. Like the individual interviews, the focus groups were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

Observations.

I conducted in and out-of-class observations at Southwest High School, the Community College, and the Borderland University. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note, observations can be seen as a continuum ranging from the role of complete observer to complete involvement in the activities that occur at the research site. Decisions on how much involvement is appropriate must be made in consideration of the research goals. Additionally, in classroom settings, the extent to which the research participates must be negotiated with the teachers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). At Southwest High School, participant-observations started on January 21, 2014 and ended on June 6, 2014. I attended the 45-minute English classes at least three times a week. My participation in the classes intensified by the end of February as the students started to work on

their research papers and the teachers gave me complete freedom to interact with the students, thus I helped them with outlines, database search, and the writing of drafts. At that point during my data collection, I attended the English classes four to five days a week. I spent approximately 57 hours in each English class, which made up a total of 114 hours for the two English classes combined.

As the classes dedicated to the research paper preparation were held in the school library, a few students would stick around after class to continue work on their papers and they often requested my help. Sometimes the students took advantage of the library space to work on college-related tasks. On one occasion I helped Julie with her financial aid application. I also helped some of the students complete their scholarship application essays. The opportunities I had to freely interact with the participants at SHS were invaluable because they strengthened our mutual trust, which in turn, contributed for the second phase of the study to flow smoothly. After they started college, especially in the first half of the semester, some of the students reported feeling out of place and isolated, thus they seemed happy when I walked in to observe their classes, invited them for lunch, or spent time with them working on assignments.

In college, I conducted three class observations in First Year Composition classes. As one of the participants, Nina, did not take FYC in her first semester, I attended her history class because this was the course that required the most reading and writing. The observations occurred in the beginning, middle, and end of the fall 2014 semester. I spent a total of 10 hours and 30 minutes observing classes at BU, and a total of 10 hours and 40 minutes observing classes at CC. The purpose of attending those classes was to document students' engagement with college-level literacies in a formal learning setting. The observations were particularly helpful in

illuminating how participants positioned themselves and were positioned in relation to others during literacy practices within a new cultural world – the world of college.

Fieldnotes.

Fieldnotes are inherent tools for data collection as they help ethnographers to “gain an insider’s depiction of the studied world” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 21). For Geertz (1973), the “studied world”, that is, the culture of a group must be understood as “interworked systems of construable signs” (p. 7). With a semiotic approach to culture in mind, Geertz (1973) argues that the role of social scientists is to “inscribe” (or write down) social discourse. In other words, the role of the ethnographer is to observe and describe culture in consideration to all semiotic systems that give life to it. In this sense, richness of details, which Geertz (1973) calls “thick description”, is the product of ethnography.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) problematize the researcher’s role in the process of providing thick description by sustaining that “No field researcher can be a completely neutral, detached observer, outside and independent of the observed phenomena” (Emerson et al., p. 3). Thus, descriptions of what is observed in the fieldwork are, to a certain extent, interpretations of phenomena; therefore the authors argue that rather than “inscribe” researchers “translate” social discourse. These are important points that I took into account when writing my own fieldnotes - as a qualitative researcher I was aware of the importance of providing “thick descriptions” of phenomena; however, I also wanted to ensure that my interpretations were fair enough. Therefore, during my fieldwork, I took every possible opportunity to talk to the participant and ask for clarification about what was observed.

Throughout this study, I wrote fieldnotes to document what was observed in and outside of classrooms. My fieldnotes were first handwritten in sheets of paper divided into two categories: “What I observed” and “My interpretation.” When observing a class, I tried to balance the writing of fieldnotes and my actual participation; however, as soon as the class ended, I would invest a great amount of time recalling and writing down what I had seen and felt. In addition to documenting what was observed in the high school and college classrooms, I also wrote fieldnotes of interactions I had with participants in the school and college cafeterias, libraries, and computer labs. I created Word documents containing all fieldnotes. Some of them were developed into memos, which helped in the process of data analysis.

Artifacts.

Artifacts comprised another source of data that was used for triangulation in this study. Some of the main artifacts used as data sources were students’ formal and informal writing samples. Formal writing samples collected in high school included the drafts of the research paper and the power points prepared by the students for their English class. In college, I collected copies of research papers and e-portfolios prepared for FYC classes as well as copies of short document analysis (turned in for history class). Informal writing samples were taken from two types of social media: *Facebook* and *Instagram*. Even though I had signed consent from the students to use these informal sources of data, I double-checked with them before actually using Facebook and Instagram posts in my data analysis. Formal and informal writing samples were a window to exploring students’ wide range of multiliterate practices.

Photographs of the research sites as well as photographs taken during literacy events in the high school were also among the artifacts used for data analysis. Hamilton (2000) stresses that photographs are very useful ethnographic tools to document a literacy event because they

capture what individuals are doing around texts in a given context. In addition to photographs taken by me, photos taken by research participants comprised another source of data (see appendix H for photos taken by the participants). In her research on first-year Latino/a college students' identities, Hungerford-Kresser (2008) had research participants take pictures of spaces within the campus that "identified who they were" at that point in their lives (Hungerford-Kresser, 2008, p. 71). The researcher explains that this type of data source was chosen over journals. Similarly, I asked this study's participants to photograph specific spaces they identified with within their high school and college campuses. In the last interview, those photographs were used as prompts for the participants to make sense of their own academic trajectories and identity constructions across spaces and time. Finally, artifacts that served as data sources also included documents from Southwest High School as well as BU and CC. These documents encompassed class handouts, copies of quizzes, school newspapers, and course syllabi.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis for this study, like in all qualitative research, was ongoing – from the beginning of data collection until the moment of writing the findings. As Emerson et al. (1995) highlight, "analysis pervades all phases on the research enterprise" and this process is "at once inductive and deductive, like someone who is simultaneously creating and solving a puzzle..." (p. 144). In the initial stages of this study, preliminary data analysis was mostly based on my fieldnotes, which described in much detail as possible what I observed in the research site. As the study progressed, I relied on the other sources of data for a broader, and yet deeper understanding of phenomena. In what follows, I describe the approaches I used for analyzing data.

Coding.

For the analysis of all textual data – interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and artifacts (i.e. students’ writing samples and school documents) - I used Emerson et al.’s (1995) open/focused coding approach. The authors define coding as the process of “putting an idea or intuition into a concrete, relatively concise word or phrase” (p.146). It is worth noting that, while quantitative data analysis typically involves fitting data into pre-established codes, qualitative analysis entails generating as many codes as needed as the researcher goes through the data. Emerson et al. (1995) calls the initial stage of data analysis “open coding.” In this stage, the ethnographer analyzes texts line-by-line focusing on describing processes, rather than trying to explain the motives behind people’s actions. Thus, in the open-coding phase researchers should not be concerned about finding patterns and categories across data. Instead, they must simply focus on describing what is happening.

Emerson et al. (1995) note that the open coding phase can be tedious and even frustrating as the researcher may feel overwhelmed by so much data pointing to different directions. Nonetheless, the authors recommend that researchers be persistent and remain open to all the possibilities this initial coding phase may offer. Following Emerson et al.’s guidelines for open-coding, I developed a total of 36 initial codes that covered a wide range of topics related to participants’ literacy practices and identities in informal contexts, and in the spaces of high school and college. Examples of initial codes were “use of technology,” “academic writing,” “informal writing,” self-perception as a student”, “bilingualism,” and so on. The process of open-coding, although time consuming, was illuminating as it allowed data to speak for itself, thus leading me to new directions but still within the scope of my investigation. To illustrate this point, I will explain in detail how the code “first-generation college student” led me to important

findings on participants’ literacies and identity constructions. The explanation that follows also illustrates the step-by-step procedures I applied to analyze all data.

When I started collecting data for this study my main focus was on bilingual students’ literacy practices and identities in their transitions from high school to college. Thus I recruited students who considered themselves bilinguals and planned to attend college soon after graduating from high school. As I started applying the open-coding technique to all textual data, I realized that the code “First-generation college student” was recurrent in individual interviews and focus-groups interviews conducted with the participant-students. In order to better make sense of what it meant for the participants to become the first in their families to go to college, I prepared a table (see below) with excerpts from their interviews.

	<p style="text-align: center;">Motivations to go to college</p> <p>Home artifacts –(discourses/positionings):</p> <p>“First-generation college students”</p> <p>“Good student”</p> <p>“Role model”</p>
Ana	<p>Int. 1:</p> <p>“Like I saw other people doing it [going to college] and I said like ‘Why can’t I do it? If they can do it, I can do it.’ And then nobody in my family has ever gone to college.</p> <p>“They [her family] told me that they wanted me to do better than them, to learn from their mistakes. So they motivated me to go [to college] so I could be the first one.”</p>
Cecilia	<p>Int. 1:</p> <p>I: She [her mother] thinks that you are a role model to your sisters?</p> <p>R: yeah.</p> <p>I: Does she tell you that?</p> <p>R: Yeah. And also because I am going to be kind of the first one in my family to graduate from high school and the first one going to college.</p> <p>Int. 3</p> <p>I: Tell me about ways in which you felt supported by your family members.</p> <p>R: I think all my family cause I was the first. I am the first one that went to college so everyone is like oh. I am kind of like an example to my sisters, you know, like “<i>Aprende con tu hermana</i>” – you know like Learn from your sister.</p>

Juan	<p>Int. 1</p> <p>“But I don’t wanna grow up to be like when I have my children they will be like “Did you go to college?” and I will be like “No. I didn’t go.” They will be like “I guess I won’t go to college either.’ I wanna be like a good example for my brother, most of all, and for my kids in the future, maybe.”</p> <p>“Like my mom encourages me to have a business for myself”</p>
Julie	<p>Int. 1</p> <p>R: My sister didn’t graduate [from high school] with her class. And I’m not that type of person. I wanna do things right. I wanna do. I wanna be like a role model ...”</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>I: So you are gonna be the first one in your family to go to college?</p> <p>R: Yes, cause my bigger sister didn’t go to college. And I wanna got to college.</p>
Nadia	<p>Int. 1</p> <p>R: No one, no one, no one. Not even on both sides of the family, no one has ever got [a college degree]. They have gone to college but either they have dropped out or they just that’s it. No one, no one, one.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>I: Do you think that your parents see you as a good student?</p> <p>R: Yeah. They’ve always seen me as a role model for my little sisters. And even my little sisters are like “I wanna be like you in school.”</p>
Natalia	<p>Int. 2</p> <p>“cause my mom and my dad they have this thing that they compare us to each other and I get mad when they compare me to my brothers sometimes. [...] I wanna show them that I am not like them cause both of them didn’t graduate with their class; then they didn’t go to college [...] So I show my parents, I show them that I work. Cause I started working when I was 16. And then I started college</p>
Nina	<p>Int. 1</p> <p>“They [her parents] expect a lot from me. They believe in me. They know that I will do good in college and in my future. It is a big pressure, I think.</p> <p>Int. 2</p> <p>“A lot of them [her cousins] graduated from high school but not everyone finishes college.</p>

The table above presents data from the interviews with the participants. In the selected excerpts, participants were describing their motivations to go to college. Using the main theory guiding this study, the figured worlds theory, I found that, in the space of home, participants’ aspirations to become the first in their families to go to college were tied to discourses (symbolic artifacts) of being “role models” and “good students.” The process of open-coding then opened

my eyes to how important it was for the participants to be the first in their families to go to college. At that point in the data analysis, the high expectations from family members also stood out as an important aspect of participants' aspirations for identities as college students. Having found that, I moved to the second stage of data analysis – focused-coding. In this stage, I went back to the transcripts of interviews with the high school teachers, my fieldnotes, memos, and documents. As I had already “open-coded” all this data, this time around my intention was to look at how aspirations for college were fostered (or not) through discourses and practices in the space of school. Thus once again I examined texts line-by-line; however, in this second phase, I was using my analytical skills by looking for relationships, patterns, and aspects of data that did not follow patterns. To facilitate this second stage of analytical process, I created a table which, similar to the one above, highlighted the discourses and practices that, in the space of the high school, seemed to foster (or not) high expectations towards students' college goals. This deeper level of analysis led me to one the main findings of this study: the gap between home and school expectations for students' college goals.

The analytical procedures previously described were applied to all textual data sources, including the interviews with college professors and my fieldnotes from college class observations. Throughout my data analysis, the creation of tables like the one above greatly helped me in the process of data triangulation.

Memos.

As previously noted, some of my fieldnotes were developed into memos. Used throughout the entire process of data collection and analysis, memo writing is a methodological tool that helps researchers to start connecting data to theory (Charmaz, 2006; Emerson et al., 1995). As Charmaz (2006) explains, when writing memos researchers consider qualitative codes

as categories to be further analyzed; they get some insights on what is not too clear and are able to make connections across data, also linking data to theory. In doing so, they may discover gaps in their data collection (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, besides being a tool for preliminary data analysis, reflective memos also help me to identify “gaps” or points in the collected data that needed clarification. For example, in one of my first memos, written on February 7, 2014, I reflected on the high school teachers’ pedagogic approach to the reading of *Frankenstein* in class and students’ apparent disengagement from the story (see appendix G for memo sample). In that memo I made some links between data observed and the literature on youth’s literacies and identities. Additionally, I wrote down questions that emerged from those initial class observations. I wondered why the students were reading the book *Frankenstein* specifically; why they were doing so in class; how they felt about that book; and who had a “voice” in curriculum planning at Southwest High School. Those questions were explored later on through informal conversations and interviews with the participants.

Summary

This chapter I described this study’s methodological framework: ethnographic case study. Additionally, I provided descriptions of the research context, participants, data collection tools and analysis process. Finally, in the section on positionality and reflexivity I “located myself in the study,” that meaning I examined aspects of my multiple identities that were common to this study’s participants as well as identity aspects that positioned me as an outsider to the group. In the subsequent chapters, I present and analyze data collected during my fieldwork.

Chapter 4: Out-of-School Bilingual Literacies and Identities

Introduction

The broader goal of this study was to examine how bilingual Latino/a youth negotiate literacies and identities in their transitions from high school to college. In this chapter, I argue that any discussion on literacies and identities in and across academic contexts must take into account how adolescents construct selves as well as nurture aspired identities, such as the identities as college students, outside of school spheres. With this in mind, two questions are fundamental to the understanding of students' transitions to college: (a) How do Latino/a borderland youth construct literate identities out of school? (b) In the context of their homes, what practices and discourses seemed to foster or constrain Latino/as' aspirations to become college students?

Scholars have drawn attention to the need for more research to understand youth's identities and youth culture through a sociocultural perspective (Moje, 2002; Wortham, 2011). The relative dearth of this type of research has contributed to the perpetuation of frameworks in which youngsters, lumped together in one monolithic group (Alvermann, 2009), are portrayed as wild/troubled (Moje, 2002), irrational, deviant and apathetic (Wortham, 2011; Bartlett, López, Mein & Valdiviezo, 2011). One of the goals of this chapter is to contribute to the deconstruction of widespread negative and monolithic views of youth. I intend to do that by exploring young Latino/as' processes of identity construction through engagement with what have been called "out-of-school", "informal", and "everyday" literacy practices. The choice of terms can be complicated if we consider that informal or everyday literacies also occur in the formal space of school, in the same way that academic literacy practices are not confined to educational institutions. I use the terms "everyday" and "out-of-school" literacies interchangeably. The use

of the latter is purposeful as I want to emphasize that certain types of literacy practices, although rich, often remain outside of the school walls because the educational system tends to value hegemonic ways of knowing. In this regard, this chapter is a window to understanding students' identities in a more holistic way, going beyond the identities performed within the constraints of English-monolingual, print-based classroom instruction. One of my goals in this chapter is to show how the literacy practices of out-of-school spaces such as home, church, and social media presented new possibilities for identity constructions. In those spaces students felt free to creatively engage in self-making through various semiotic channels – print-based, technology mediated, in English, Spanish, and translanguaging.

Besides examining identity construction through reading and writing in out-of-school and virtual contexts, this chapter also explores the space of home as crucial in shaping participants' views on formal education as well as their aspirations for expanding their repertoire of literacies and identities by pursuing higher education. As we will see in the second half of this chapter, because all participants would be the first in their families to go to college, their families held high expectations for them. For the young Latino/as in this study, going to college not only meant the safest avenue to success in life but, most importantly, it meant that they were paving the way for younger siblings' academic success as well. Discourses of going to college and becoming role models, very much emphasized in the context of home, seemed to have become integral parts of students' identities. In some cases, students were already seen as role models; therefore, going to college was just a matter of continuing to be coherent with what was expected from them.

This chapter is organized as follows: the first half of the chapter focuses on participants' literate identity constructions through engagement with material artifacts – first, print-based

reading and writing artifacts; then, reading and writing mediated by digital technologies.

Following that, I shift my analysis to symbolic artifacts – powerful discourses – that circulated in the space of home and seemed to influence participants’ aspirations for college identities. My analysis takes into consideration how motivations to go to college were fostered at home and the tensions in negotiating identities that participants in this study faced as the first in their families to go to college.

Print-Based Literacy Practices

Feeding into monolithic perspectives on adolescents is the notion that all youth are technology savvy and that they are not interested in the “old” (print-based) literacies. This section challenges such views by showing how print-based literacies, both in English and Spanish, were very much part of young Latino/as’ daily lives. Five participants, Ana, Cecilia, Natalia, Nadia, and Nina told me that they enjoyed reading print-based materials and that they did it on a regular basis. Their reading interests included popular fiction books, biographies, newspaper articles, magazines, and religious literature such as the Bible and Christian novels.

Ana, Natalia, and Cecilia: The popular fiction readers.

Ana saw herself as a fluent bilingual reader and writer. Although Ana used Spanish daily, both at home and at work, she considered English to be her dominant language. Ana enjoyed reading popular fiction novels written in English. She would read novels that her friends recommended to her. In one of our interviews, she told me about the most recent book she had read – *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Ana: I started reading *The Fault in Our Stars* – ‘cause I had already seen the movie so I read the book and the book was really good.

Luciene: Oh, so did you like it?

Ana: um- hum. I like the book better than the movie. [...]

Luciene: And how did you decide to read the book?

Ana: Because a lot of people were telling me that the book was better than the movie. So I was like I have to read it to see if it is true. (Individual interview, 02/12/2015)

Because popular fiction books are often adapted into movies, some participants felt motivated to read them. Like Ana, Natalia also enjoyed reading books and watching the movies based on them. Natalia really enjoyed reading the *Twilight* book series:

Luciene: Which was the longest book that you read?

Natalia: I think it was *Twilight*. I read all those books.

Luciene: Really? Those are really big books. Do you know how many pages?

Natalia: About 500. The last one is the longest one. It is the *Breaking Dawn*.

Luciene: Can you tell more about that?

Natalia: You know that there is like 4 books? I didn't read the first one because the movie had already come out so I was not interested. And then I read the second one which was the *New Moon*. I liked that one. That was nice. It has more details than the movies. It explains it more. (Natalia, individual interview, 02/09/2015).

The excerpt shows that Natalia was an avid reader of popular fiction books. She told me the habit of reading those books started for her in 8th grade as her English teacher encouraged students to read the first *Twilight* book for extra credit. Natalia and her classmates read the first book and watched the movie together. After this experience, Natalia started to read the book series on her own. For her it was important to read the book first and then watch the screen

version. Both Natalia and Ana felt motivated to read books that would be adapted into movies. Seeing the story through two different modes of representation appeared to stimulate the two Latinas' analytical skills and both of them agreed that the printed version of the story was better. Like Ana and Natalia, Cecilia was also a keen reader. In our first interview, Cecilia positioned herself as a very good bilingual reader and writer. When I asked her about the types of materials she enjoyed reading, she promptly answered, "Anything. I will read it" (Individual interview, 05/20/2014). Popular fiction novels, however, were her favorite reading materials. She would also read magazines in Spanish:

Luciene: And do you read books in Spanish?

Cecilia: Recently no, but I do read Spanish sometimes. Like my mom's magazines and stuff are in Spanish and I read those. (Individual interview, 05/20/2014)

Cecilia's mom, like all the other participants' parents or guardians, was a Spanish speaker, therefore in their homes there usually was availability of print materials in Spanish. Cecilia's excerpt demonstrates that she took advantage of the resources available to her in the context of her home.

Maintaining bilingualism through reading: Nadia and Nina.

For two participants, Nadia and Nina, reading in Spanish was a conscious choice as they sought to maintain fluency in Spanish literacies. Nadia, who saw herself as a very good bilingual reader and writer, shared why she became interested in biographies, "My dad was always the one who always used to read" (Nadia, individual interview, 05/09/2014). Because of her dad's influence, Nadia has read biographies of figures such as Charlie Chaplin, Anne Frank, Pancho Villa and Princess Diana:

Luciene: And when you read those books that you mentioned, were these in English?

Nadia: Hum, *Anne Frank* was in English. *Pancho Villa* was in Spanish. I tried to read in both languages.

Luciene: What was your motivation? Did you parents insist that you read in both languages?

Nadia: I mean, if the books were there and I could read in both languages, I was like I might as well you know like practice and learn. (Nadia, individual interview, 05/09/2014)

The excerpt above demonstrates Nadia's interest not only in developing her Spanish reading abilities but also in learning about prominent real-life characters who have made history in different parts of the world, including Mexico, the country of Nadia's cultural heritage. Nadia added that she used to read more when she was younger and that her dad frequently asks her why she does not read as much as when she was in elementary and middle school. She explained that this shift in her reading habits happened during high school as she needed to invest more time studying for her classes and also because she started working in her junior year.

Nina, who thought of herself as a very good bilingual reader and writer, had always been a keen reader. She enjoyed reading love stories in non-fiction and popular fiction books as well as Christian novels. Christianity was a significant component of Nina's literacy practices and identity as she had been raised according to those religious principles. During an informal conversation Nina and I had in the high school, she told me that she was particularly fond of Christian novels and added that reading them in Spanish was a way to develop her language abilities even more (Field notes, 9 May, 2014). By the time we had our last interview, Nina told

me that she had just read her favorite Christian novel for the third time. In addition to novels, Nina also was an active reader of the Bible and participated in Bible studies in her church along with other youth. Because the Bible study involved interesting use of translanguaging, it is going to be discussed in the next section.

Translanguaging in non-virtual spaces.

With the advance of technology and multimodality, the practice of translanguaging has become increasingly common, particularly in social media. This section, however, focuses on the translanguaging practices of two participants, Cecilia and Nina, in traditional paper-based writing. Garcia (2009) sees translanguaging as a process of dynamic bilingualism, which she defines as “language practices that are multiple and ever adjusting to the multilingual multimodal terrain of the communicative act” (p. 144). In this study, both Cecilia and Nina engaged in translanguaging. Cecilia told me that she practiced translanguaging when writing in her diary. Cecilia developed the habit of writing diaries since elementary school and she kept it through middle and high school. In her diary, Cecilia told me, she would write about her feelings – whether she was happy or upset, poems that she liked, dreams, and goals for the future. Whenever Cecilia accomplished one of her goals, she would check them off in her diary. In the excerpt below Cecilia told me about her choices of language when writing in her diary:

Luciene: What language do you write more often in? In your personal diary, for example?

Cacilia: Um, more English but I also write in Spanish too. When I don’t know how to say something in English or that I like to say in Spanish, then I write in Spanish.

Luciene: So you use both?

Cecilia: Um-hum, both.

Luciene: Do you mix sometimes?

Cecilia: Um-hum, Spanglish. Yes, a lot. (Individual interview, 05/20/2014)

Cecilia preferred to write in English; however, as she explained, she usually drew on Spanish when she was not sure how to say something in English or whenever she felt that the meanings were best captured in Spanish. By the end of the excerpt Cecilia stated that she used “Spanglish” a lot. Historically, the practice of “Spanglish” has been seen from both negative and positive perspectives. As Garcia and Wei (2014) explain, while this term is stigmatized by the elite, ethnolinguists have appropriated it to describe the fluidity of languages. In the work of the poet and borderland scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, for example, Spanglish receives the status of language in itself. For Garcia and Wei (2014) terms such as Spanglish and code switching are controversial because they do not necessarily convey the notion of fluidity between languages. Translanguaging, on the other hand, is a term that expresses the hybridity of languages into a single integrated system. The use of translanguaging then is political and empowering as their users draw on their linguistic repertoire to (re)-create meanings (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

In this study, translanguaging in writing was also used by Nina. As previously mentioned, Nina was raised in a Christian family. Since childhood, Nina has been a member of the same church where, according to her, she is seen as a leader by other youngsters. In Nina’s church, the great majority of the literacy practices are in Spanish. In the excerpt below, she described how translanguaging occurs during literacy events such as Bible studies in the context of her church:

Luciene: But you had told me that you read the Bible in Spanish.

Nina: Yeah, at home and church it is all Spanish so we read the Bible in Spanish.

Luciene: And do you take little notes? Like if it is a Bible study?

Nina: If I take notes, they are still in English or I mix it. If I can't translate, I will be just like "Oh, I will just write it in Spanish." But I try to keep it in English because sometimes I understand it better.

Luciene: But the Bible is in Spanish and the people in the church speak in Spanish. Is that right?

Nina: Yeah. But there is Sunday school and that's when it is like the youth. And my teacher will start talking both cause I think that she likes English more but since we read the Bible in Spanish, she will try to also say it in Spanish. And sometimes she has the English Bible and the Spanish Bible. So I am always mixing and I am always learning both. (Individual interview, 10/31/2014)

Nina's general description of literacy events in her church reminds us that multimodality is not restricted to the virtual world. Even though the term is very frequently used in literature related to digital technologies, multimodality has always been part of our "real world" as most of us communicate daily through reading, writing, and/or speaking (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Nevertheless, the concept of multimodality certainly gains more visibility during literacy events such as the one described by Nina in which bilinguals or multilinguals make use of all semiotic channels available to them to produce meaning. Interestingly, by the end of her narrative, Nina said that she had been able to learn both English and Spanish through those religious literacy events. In fact, a closer look at her narrative reveals the sophistication of those events – first, it seems that all participants involved in them were bilingual to different extents; second, these literacy events involved reading, writing, and talking about the Bible in two versions: the English and the Spanish versions. Although Nina's dominant language is English, when I asked her which version of the Bible she liked better, she said, "I think the Spanish. Maybe because I am

more used to the Spanish Bible so I just feel more connected to that. But yeah, I think it would be Spanish for sure” (Individual interview, 10/31/2014).

Nina’s attachment to the Spanish version of the Bible can be better understood through the work of González (2001). The author’s three-year ethnographic study in the borderlands titled *I am my Language*, examines the process of language socialization of Mexican-origin children as they interacted with caregivers. Central to this analysis was the intertwined relationship among socioeconomic context, language, and social identity. González’s (2001) most significant finding was the strong relation between language and emotion. She wrote “the dimensions of Spanish were far different from the dimensions of English. They did not feel the same taste or sound the same. Spanish was the language of family of food, of music, of ritual—in short, of identity” (González, 2001, p.50). Thus, even though Nina was born in the U.S. and considered her dominant language to be English, she felt more emotionally connected to Spanish, at least in relation to specific practices such as religious rituals which she learned from her parents whose first language is Spanish.

Struggling with reading: Julie.

Julie lived and went to school in New Mexico until 7th grade. After that she moved in with her grandparents in Texas where she did her high school. Julie considered her dominant language to be English. According to her, she could speak Spanish fluently; however, she could not read or write it well. Julie had also struggled with academic literacies in English, especially reading, since elementary school. In our first interview I asked her if she had had any negative experience with reading and/or writing and she answered:

My negative experience is not knowing what I am reading. It was one of these things that you are like “What am I reading?” And there was this time when in first

grade I was reading a novel, my teacher told me, “Ok, so where is the setting?” or she would ask me simple questions and I told her, “Ms. I don’t even know what we are reading about.” And she was like surprised because you would expect me to know everything that was happening, you know. But I was one of those students that was like, either stop on the story and talk about it or you don’t, you know? But I would want these teachers to stop and talk about it. That way I would know what I am reading cause if I don’t know what I am reading, I am not gonna enjoy the story. I’m not gonna like it (Julie, Individual interview, 05/12/2014).

The passage above illustrates Julie’s struggle with reading during elementary school. Her difficulty in understanding texts persisted through her middle school and even in high school. I asked Julie if she could identify what exactly hindered her reading and she told me that the entire text structure or “storytelling” (in her words) was a challenge for her, thus she did not enjoy reading long novels because she found them confusing. Despite her struggle with reading, Julie had never been tested for reading disability.

Although reading was a challenge for Julie, she had the habit of reading shorter pieces such as newspaper articles. She told me, “Usually what I like to read most is stuff on the newspaper ‘cause since I’m a journalist - I’m in the Yearbook and the Newspaper, so I will do that” (Julie, Individual interview, 05/12/2014). In this quote, Julie positioned herself as a journalist, which seemed to be a very important aspect of her identity as she proudly talked about being the co-editor of the school newspaper since her freshman year. When I asked Julie if she enjoyed writing, she answered, “Writing, I do. But it’s one the things I have trouble doing” (Individual interview, 05/12/2014:). Here Julie positioned herself as someone who did not possess strong writing abilities, however, she tried to reposition herself by reading newspapers

articles in her free time. In personal communication, she told me, “I try to read newspaper articles whenever I can. That way I can improve my writing” (Field notes, 17 April, 2014). Although reading and writing were not easy, Julie actively engaged with those activities outside school, especially because she identified herself as a journalist.

Digital Literacy Practices

All participants engaged with digital literacies to different extents and for various purposes. The most cited digital literacy practices involved the use of Google, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and texting. As expected, those practices involved the use of English, Spanish, and tranlanguaging. This section is organized according to students’ purposes for using digital technologies. Those were (1) Learning about topics of their interest; (2) Communicating with friends and family; and (3) Use of social media to express feelings.

Learning about a topic of personal interest.

In my first interview with Juan I asked if he enjoyed reading and he immediately positioned himself as a non-reader; however, his response was contradictory. He said:

Reading, honestly, I don’t like reading. If I would read something, it would be like a horror novel. I love to read articles – not like political or anything; ‘cause I am a lot into cars, so I like to read a lot of articles about cars like races and stuff like that; mostly sports. Anything that I related with cars and with engines and anything like that. (Juan, individual interview, 5/7/2014)

Juan’s response reveals that he was actually a very active reader; however, the fact that he positioned himself as a non-reader indicates that he did not see value in literacy practices that are not necessarily academic-related. In our second interview, Juan went on to describe a little

more about his reading interests, “Yeah, I actually read a lot of articles on that. Like F-1, racing, I read about that, I read about cars like new cars that are coming out and stuff like that. (Juan, individual interview, 10/29/2014). Juan explained to me how he started to get interested in reading about cars. His motivation was fixing his old Mustang which was always breaking and leaking. In order to learn how to fix his car, Juan would talk to his cousin’s husband who is a mechanic and then Juan would watch videos on YouTube and participate in discussion forums online. Juan explained that these literacy practices he engaged with were both in English and Spanish. Learning about cars was really important for Juan and started to increasingly shape his identity as later on, while in college, he decided to pursue an associate degree in automotive technology at a local community college.

Alvermann (2009) discusses how the web has become an alternative learning space which disrupts power relations that structure traditional face-to-face learning environments. Online learning, explains Alvermann (2009), blurs the lines between “novice” and “expert” because we are often unaware of who we are communicating with. Thus, on the web, knowledge is more democratically produced and distributed across different age, gender, race/ethnic, and social class groups. Juan’s online literacy practices presented in this section are examples of self-motivation where “learners take responsibility for their own learning” (Alvermann, 2009, p. 101). By reading articles and participating in discussion forums online, Juan, without the supervision of an “expert”, Juan crafted his literate identity. In short, engagement with car-related literacy practices online as well as hands-on activities like fixing cars, not only affirmed Juan’s identity as someone who is interested and knowledgeable about cars; it also opened up possibilities of becoming as Juan started to envision himself pursuing an associate degree in automotive technology in order to open his own car shop in the future.

Communicating with friends and family.

Digital technology was also useful for participants to keep in touch with friends and family in the U.S. and in Mexico. The most used technology tools for this purpose were text messaging, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. One of the ways Julie communicated with her mom who was living in Santa Fe was through texting; however, she told me, and “I am not much of a texter. I do like to text my mom and some friends but I am not much of a person that texts too much like those addict people.” (Julie, individual interview, 5/12/2014). Through Facebook, Cecilia communicated with her family in Mexico:

Cecilia: I have family. My grandma is over there [in Mexico] right now. But my uncle lives over there as well.

Luciene: Do you visit them often?

Cecilia: Uh-um, I went there this past summer, to go to Mexico with them. Luciene: So you spent the whole summer there?

Cecilia: Yeah, I even missed the first days of school ‘cause I was over there cause it was fun.

Luciene: And you keep on communicating with people over there?

Cecilia: Uh-um, through Facebook or they call us like every week to tell us how they are doing and stuff.(Cecilia, individual interview, 5/20/2014)

Besides communicating with family members across the border, Cecilia and the other participants also used Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram to keep in touch with high school friends, especially after graduation. Instagram and Snapchat were participants’ favorite social media applications because they prompted communication mainly through pictures and videos. Snapchat users found the application fun mainly because they were able to send short funny

videos and pictures to selected friends who would be able to see the images for five to ten seconds before they were automatically erased. Sometimes captions were added to the images.

Cecilia told me about her use of Snapchat:

Luciene: Do you keep in touch with other high school friends, even the ones who are not coming here [to Community College]?

Cecilia: Yeah, I will talk to them like not a lot but a little bit. Like I will talk to Nina. I will say like “sometime we need to hang out” but we really don’t. But we talk just here and there.

Luciene: Through Facebook?

Cecilia: No, through Snapchat. It is like an app. It is like pictures and stuff. (Cecilia, individual interview, 10/28/2014).

In the excerpt above Cecilia, who went to Community College right after graduating from high school, explained how she used Snapchat to communicate with Nina who was attending the Borderland University. Similarly to Snapchat, Instagram focused on images, pictures or videos, accompanied by captions or a paragraph. As I had formal consent to access content from participants’ social media accounts, I observed how the post of images on Instagram would establish communication among the students. After high school graduation, it was common to see nostalgic posts about high school times. Those posts were mostly seen on Thursdays, under #TBT which stands for “Throwback Thursdays”. This common practice in social media encourages users to share content, particularly images, from earlier times. Cecilia and Ana, two best friends, would sometimes use Instagram for that purpose. Even though after graduating they still saw each other quite often at the Community College, they did not spend as much time together as they used to, thus they would post pictures from high school times. Those pictures

would prompt a conversation on how they missed the old times and how they should hang out more (Ana's Instagram post, October, 2014; Cecilia's Instagram post, October, 2014). Social media then allowed participants to maintain social networks established years ago Ana, Cecilia, Nadia, and Nina, for example, have been friends since elementary school.

Use of social media to express feelings.

While some participants used social media to maintain communication with family and friends, Nadia's use of social network went beyond that. She was the most frequent user of Instagram and Facebook having an average of four posts a day. Nadia's posts would range from critical views on controversial issues to simple comments on how she felt about the weather, for example. In one of our interviews, Nadia and I talked about her frequent posts on Facebook and she said, "I like to give my opinion a lot. Like in political views and stuff like that [...] I like doing that, I like expressing my opinion in my writing" (Nadia, individual interview, 5/9/2014). Some of Nadia's Facebook posts that expressed critical views addressed the topics of abortion, child abuse, and immigration laws. Although social media are generally considered informal communication spaces, Nadia told me she was attentive to the way she expressed herself. She said:

'Cause I see on Facebook when people write their opinion but they misspell it, and then people make fun of them or they don't take them serious, you know? So that's why I am like if I'm gonna give my opinion, either I sound educated like if I know about the subject or I won't say anything 'cause I'm just gonna look dumb practically. So yeah. (Nadia, individual interview, 5/9/2014)

Nadia's comment is related to both content and form: in order to "sound educated", as she put it, she had to not only write according to language rules and conventions but also be well

informed about the topic she wanted to write about. In addition to using Facebook as a tool for expressing views on critical topics, Nadia used it to express strong emotions such as love and sadness. When her grandfather passed away she posted a picture in which she stood close to him. The picture had been taken when Nadia was in pre-kindergarten. Accompanying the picture, there was a long paragraph in which Nadia described how much it hurt to have lost her grandfather and how much she missed him (Nadia, Facebook post, 10/23/ 2014). This particular post was written in English but the comments that followed it, posted by Nadia's friends and Nadia herself, were written in Spanish, English, and Spanglish. Nadia's Facebook page was filled with declarations of love for her boyfriend as well. As her boyfriend was Mexican and lived across the border, Nadia preferred to write long and very emotional paragraphs to him in Spanish but English and Spanglish were also used at times. Figure 4.1 shows one of Nadia's bilingual Facebook posts addressing her boyfriend:



Figure 4.1 Nadia's bilingual Facebook post (07/07/2014)

In the example above, Nadia chose to express her love by making use of different semiotic modes. She used English and Spanish combined with internet variations of language

such as “oh” for “o” meaning “or” in English. Her multimodal message gained more expression through the use of emoticons, exclamation marks, and repetition of letters as seen in the sentence “te amoooo.” It is important to note that the Spanish language is more predominant in Nadia’s post – she started the message in Spanish and continued to use this language throughout the message until the very end when she switched to English. The young Latina’s language choices were conscious and purposeful as her message directly addressed her boyfriend, whose first and predominant language was Spanish.

Nadia’s Facebook post reads as an electronic diary or journal in which she freely expresses her feelings. In contrast with Nadia, there were participants who rejected certain practices on social media. Cecilia, for example, would keep a journal in which she expressed her feelings but she did not think of social media as spaces for this purpose. When I asked her if she would sometimes write her feelings on Facebook, she replied, “I do paper and pencil ‘cause online it is like not really. I like to keep it to myself and just read it” (Cecilia, individual interview, 10/28/2014). Natalia also shared the view that social media were not spaces for writing about feelings. She said, “I don’t feel like people need to know. To be honest, nobody cares so why put it?” (Natalia, individual interview, 10/27/2014).

While Natalia saw no purpose in posting her feelings on social media, another participant, Ana, thought of social media, especially Facebook, as spaces of fake personas; therefore she did not have a Facebook account. She shared, “There’s people that when they put things there [on Facebook], they don’t mean it. Like some people do it just to be cool like ‘Oh, I am gonna go out to party’; ‘I hate my mom’, you know, stuff like that” (Ana, individual interview, 05/06/2014). Ana used Instagram sporadically to post pictures with her high school friends and her boyfriend. The pictures were usually accompanied by two or three sentences

describing the importance of those people in her life. Ana's short messages on Instagram were not as emotionally charged as Nadia's. Ana told me, however, that she liked to express her feelings towards her boyfriend through love letters. The young Latina told me that she regularly wrote letters to her boyfriend in English because, despite of speaking Spanish fluently, her boyfriend could not read or write in Spanish.

Data discussed in this section shows that adolescents may have very different purposes for using social media. While some youth may choose to freely express their views on social media and do it often, others were more contained when using of social media.

Summary

The first half of this chapter focused on examining participants' print-based and web-based literacy practices out of school. Supporting previous research findings on adolescent and literacy (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer & Morris, 2008), data in this study showed that, outside school, youth actively engaged with literacy practices that represented who they were – their interests and beliefs - and who they sought to become. By reading literature such as fiction books and the Bible, communicating with family across the U.S.-Mexico border, or participating in online forums about cars, the youth in this study were able to build and expand social networks with people who shared the same interests as them. In other words, through those literacy practices youth enacted multiple identities and in turn, their interactions with texts and members of various discourse communities, shaped their identities and future aspirations (Moje et al. 2008). Thus out-of-school spaces offered many opportunities for identity constructions though active engagement with reading and writing.

The findings related to youth's literacy and identities outside formal learning settings are important because they contribute to debunking myths around adolescents and literacy. First, as

previously mentioned, the adolescents in this study did engage with reading and writing on a regular basis outside school for different purposes. Nina, Cecilia, Nadia, and Ana, who engaged more frequently with writing, for example, demonstrated skillfulness in adapting language to audiences (Canagarajah, 2011) as they opted for using English, Spanish or Spanglish according to the context. Juan's reading and writing outside school were indirectly related to academic purposes as he was motivated to acquire knowledge that would help to shape his career goals.

Contradicting the myth that adolescent literacy only revolves around digital technology, findings revealed that the youth in this study engaged in both "new" and "old" literacies (Gee, 2012). Cecilia, for example, kept a diary in which she would write her reflections and feelings. The Latina refused to do that online as she thought it would be too much exposure. On the other hand, Nadia saw Facebook as a type of electronic journal where she would freely express her emotions and critical views. Ana simply rejected Facebook for believing that, in that space, people pretended to be what they are not.

Finally, besides helping to deconstruct myths regarding adolescent culture, this chapter's findings also challenged discourses that stigmatize bilinguals who practice translanguaging. Nina's strategic use of translanguaging, both orally and in writing, during bible studies was very elaborated. Nina believed that this practice helped her to develop Spanish literacies. The findings presented so far point to the need for more research on adolescent literacy through the eyes of youth. As Christenbury, Bomer, and Smagorinsky (2009) highlight, because researchers, policymakers, and educators have historically looked at adolescents as "adults-in-training" (p.5), myths around adolescent culture continue to be reproduced. Thus doing research through the eyes of adolescents implies acknowledging that they are creative thinkers, knowledge producers and consumers.

Aspiring to Become College Students

Having explored Latino/a youth's agentic processes of self-construction through engagement with material artifacts such as books, magazines, diaries, computers, phones and so on, I now examine symbolic artifacts that influenced students' aspirations for college identities. Drawing on the theories of identity as positioning (Holland et al., 1998), I look at the space of home as a figured world in which college aspirations were fostered through interactions with family members. As data in this section will consistently show, family members, especially parents and siblings, were key in shaping participants' aspirations for a college degree. This major finding within this section contributes to deconstructing "familial deficit" views (Valencia, 2002), which derive from the widespread deficit thinking ideology that stigmatizes families of color in the U.S. The familial deficit perspective, Valencia (2002) explains, has been reproduced as an explanation for Mexican American children's "failure" in schools. This deficit perspective is based on the assumption that Mexican American parents do not value education, therefore their children do not succeed academically. Kiyama (2010) highlights that even though research has increasingly evidenced Mexican Americans' positive views and aspirations towards education, myths that position those families as uninterested in education and disengaged from school activities still persist.

The question this section seeks to answer is: in the context of home, what practices and discourses seemed to foster or constrain Latino/as' aspirations for college identities? Data analysis revealed that it was in the space of home that powerful discourses (symbolic artifacts) related to college started to circulate. As participants internalized those discourses that were produced in interaction with family members, their aspirations for college identities increased.

“Good students” and “role models.”

The labels “good student” and “role models” emerged in many of the interviews with the participants and those labels were usually tied to narratives of being the first in their families to attend college. The theory of figured worlds can be useful in explaining how labels or cultural artifacts like “good student”, for example, function as tools that mediate identity construction. Drawing on the Vygotskian notion of semiotic mediation, Bartlett and Holland (2002) argue that cultural artifacts, which can be material or symbolic like labels, open up figured worlds. In fact, they are the product of human activity but they also produce activity. Commitment to the activity of going to college produced powerful artifacts/positionings -- “good student”, “role models” -- which seemed to have been accepted by the seven participants. The more students internalized those labels, the more motivated they felt to enter the figure world of college. In short, artifacts are the product of human behavior but they also serve to regulate future behavior (Holland et al., 1998).

In this study, all participants expressed their desire to go to college either to become role models or to continue being perceived as a role model in their families. Nevertheless, the discourses around going to college seemed to circulate more in some households than others, and sometimes parents would make it explicit for their children that they needed to pursue postsecondary education in order to become a role model. Only two participants in this study, Julie and Natalia, did not report being exposed to discourses of going to college in the context of their households. Even though these Latinas reported wanting to become examples by going to college, it seemed that factors other than family expectations led them to take up this positioning. Julie’s and Natalia’s family dynamics were quite different from the other participants. Their stories will be further explored in the next section of this chapter.

Having younger siblings emerged as factor strongly impacting Latino/a youth's sense of self and aspirations for the future. Six participants, except for Natalia, had younger siblings. These participants often talked about being the first to go to college in order to become role models for the younger generations. When I asked Juan about his motivations to go to college, he told me:

I don't wanna leave high school and just work at McDonalds for the rest of my life.

I don't wanna go to work in construction like the sun beating down on me, the cold; and I am gonna work my ass off and break my back, I will be tired when I get home and not even say "hi" to my family just go straight to sleep. Wake up the next morning and straight to work. Same thing every day. I don't wanna be fed at MacDonald's for the rest of my life. If I became a manager at McDonalds, I guess that would be alright. But I don't wanna grow up to be like when I have my children they will be like "Did you go to college?" and I will be like "No. I didn't go." They will be like "I guess I won't go to college either." I wanna be like a good example for my brother, most of all, and for my kids in the future, maybe. (Juan, individual interview, 05/07/2014).

Juan, as the excerpt shows, was motivated to go to college because he saw it as a path to upward mobility. At one point during his narrative he said that it would "alright" if he became the manager of McDonald's, his workplace during the time of our first interview. Later in his narrative, Juan changed his mind about being content with becoming the manager of MacDonald's and not attending college. He elaborated on the importance of going to college in order to become an example to his younger brother and to future generations. Like Juan, Nadia

also took upon herself the responsibility to become a role model for her three younger sisters.

The following is what she told me in relation to her motivations to go to college:

Luciene: And are there other people who graduated from college in your family?

Nadia: No one, no one, no one. Not even on both sides of the family, no one has ever got... They have gone to college but either they have dropped out or they just that's it. No one, no one, no one.

Luciene: And how does it make you feel like "I'm gonna be the first."

Nadia: That pushes me a lot more 'cause I want to be like I said like a role model for the younger generations to become like a routine, for it to become like you have to go to college... (Cecilia, individual interview, 20/05/2014)

Like Juan and Nadia, Cecilia also talked about becoming an example for her younger sisters. In Cecilia's case, her mother would explicitly tell her that she needed to be a role model:

Luciene: Do you think that your mom sees you as a good student?

Cecilia: Yes, I think so because she would like me to be my sisters' role models.

Be a role model to them, you know what I mean, like that?

Luciene: She thinks that you are a role model to your sisters?

Cecilia: Yeah.

Luciene: Does she tell you that?

Cecilia: Yeah. And also because I am going to be kind of the first one in my family to graduate from high school and the first one going to college. (Cecilia, individual interview, 20/05/2014)

The excerpts discussed so far clearly show the relationship between “good student”, “role models” (positionings) and the activity – the future activity - of going to college. Essentially, participants were seen as role models because they would be the first in their families to go to college. Being a role model, however, was not limited to the future activity of attending college; it also involved present activities in which participants would provide tutoring and mentoring to younger siblings. Thus participants’ “role model” identities, which were directly linked to their college aspirations, were “thickened” (Holland & Lave, 2001) either through literacy practices such as helping siblings with homework or providing siblings with advice that would help them to be successful in school. Julie, for example, also told me that she wanted to become a role model for her two younger siblings. Despite struggling with reading and writing, Julie enthusiastically told me about how she helped her fourth grader sister with school homework:

Luciene: And what about your sister? Do you think she sees you as good student?

Julie: Yeah, cause she tells me “Hey, can you help me on this?” or something, you know. Like she always needs help with something so I am always helping her with either math... (Julie, individual interview, 02/10/2015).

Cecilia also told me about helping her younger sister with math and reading:

Luciene: So do you feel like that? Do you feel like a role model to your siblings?

Cecilia: Yes, I do cause they look up to me a lot.

Luciene: How do you know that?

Cecilia: Because everything do, they always try to copy me. They always try to be better than me. I come in with good grade and they are like “Oh, pues I ...I” [giggles] see, my Spanish. They come in and they are like “Oh, I got better grades

than you.” Or “Next time I am gonna beat you.” You know like that. So they like the competition as well.

Luciene: And do you help them?

Cecilia: Oh yeah, especially my little sister. Like she always needs help with her math and her reading (Cecilia, individual interview, 20/05/2014).

Cecilia’s passage is a clear example of how identities are constructed in practice and are, sometimes, strengthened across contexts: In interaction with the artifacts of school, i.e. quizzes tests, essay writing, and so on, Cecilia was able to construct the identity of “good student.” This positioning impacted the way she was perceived by her sisters who would look up to her and try to “copy” her. In providing support with math and reading to her siblings, Cecilia reinforced her identity as good student and role model.

Likewise, Nadia told me about how her sisters, especially one who was in middle school, would see her as a source of guidance:

She’s um, right now she’s 11 but ever since she was younger she has always wanted to be like my follower. Like she has always followed my steps. She is like “Nadia, how do I do this?” “Is my homework good?” and this. I see a lot of myself in her when I was smaller. She always tries to get the comments I used to want to get from people, you know what I mean? (Nadia, individual interview, 05/09/2014).

While Cecilia, Julie and Nadia shared narratives of helping their younger sisters with homework, Nina and Ana would support their younger siblings by mentoring them. Nina would encourage her brother to do well in school:

[...] And my little brother, he is ... he could be like me but then he slacks it a lot. He is lazy. I always tell him, “you have to do good. You have to do good.” And he

is like “yeah, but I am not like you.” And I am like, “It is not that you have to be like me but you have to try.” He looks up to me a lot and he has pressure too.

The excerpt above highlights Nina’s role as mentor to her brother who struggled in school. Apparently, even though Nina’s brother felt the pressure of being compared to her, he respected her as a mentor. In the same way, Ana described how she advised her younger sister, a freshman student at Southwest High School, on academic matters:

[...] I told [my sister] like for math, we could have started [taking math classes] a year earlier [...] I told her “Do it, if you can.” And she did. She is really good, I think. Like she took AP Spanish III in her 8th grade year. And I took it in my freshman year so I thought it was like an advantage that she had ‘cause she was able to take it. And then she took her algebra class in 8th grade and now she is starting here like how I started with math [...] So it’s like I’m taking 6 math classes throughout my whole high school. So that’s what I want her to be able to do. And I think she could (Ana, individual interview, 05/06/2014).

This passage shows how Ana completely embraced her positioning as role model by making sure that her sister took the same classes that she did in order to be better prepared for college. Ana also told me that she participated in many clubs in the school because she believed that engagement with these types of activities was important both for recognition in the school and for enhancing her curriculum vitae. She encouraged her sister to join clubs as well. Ana closed our conversation on how she mentored her sister by saying, “I wish I had someone to tell me like ‘Oh, you should have done this or should’ve done that.’ I wish I had that” (Ana, individual interview, 05/06/2014). Ana regretted not having had a close mentor who could have provided her with academic advice. Indeed, this was true for all other participants: they were

expected to be role models; however, participants themselves did not have, in their immediate families, role models for postsecondary education. Not having someone in the nuclear family who could advise participants on college-related matters generated a set of discourses on “what not to do/become.” The next section will explore how participants’ college aspirations were shaped by the duality of what they wanted to become – successful, role models for their siblings - and what they did not want to do or become – someone who struggles financially for not having pursued higher education.

Discourses on what not to do/become.

In the previous section I demonstrated how, in the space of home, participants’ identities were constructed around discourses that linked the notion of being good students and role models to college aspirations. The Latino/a youth often said that they wanted to go to college to become or continue being role models for their siblings. In students’ conceptions, to be a role model involved providing academic support for siblings and also being committed to going to college. In this section, I draw on students’ own conceptions of role model to argue that their identities were shaped between discourses on what they wanted to become - examples for younger generations - and what they did not want to become – people who struggle financially for not having a college degree. Those dualistic narratives were very recurrent whenever I talked to participants about their motivations to go to college.

The discourses on “what not to do/become” seemed to be linked to the fact that participants themselves did not have, in their immediate families, role models for higher education. Participants’ narratives on what they did not want to do or become were centered on real stories of people in their families or friends who did not go to college or who dropped out of college. Thus, those stories became examples of what not to do. It is important to keep in mind

that going to college and graduating is not always a matter of choice; socioeconomic status is a key aspect hindering Latino/a youth's educational goals in the U.S (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Thus, financial constraints, among other factors, might have limited participants' family members from obtaining a college degree; however, all of them believed that higher education was the safest path to social mobility.

In the excerpt below, Ana shared a narrative on what she did not want to become based on her negative experience with her father and his side of the family. As shown in the participants' profiles in the methods section, Ana reported feeling disconnected from her father and his part of the family. Ana felt particularly upset with them for not having attended her high school graduation ceremony. In the excerpt below, Ana described her frustration with some of her family members, which, seemed to be a motivation for her to pursue a college degree:

I think like I had a really hard history with my dad's family like on and off; like it's really bad. But [...] the way that I see some people like I said to myself "I don't want to be like them." Like I actually want to be someone in life. And I don't wanna follow their path. Like, I am gonna be the first in my family to go to college and that makes you feel good (Ana, individual interview, 05/06/2014).

Ana's narrative reveals that, for the young Latina, going to college was a way to distance herself from her father's side of the family, who she did connect with or admire. In pursuing higher education, Ana would become a different type of person or "someone in life," as she put it. The analysis of Ana's above excerpt on its own is dangerous, as it could suggest that the young Latina did not have any support from her family to pursue her educational goals. Therefore, it is important to bring some more context into the analysis. As I continued my conversation with Ana, I asked her who had influenced her views on education and she replied,

“They [her mother’s family members] told me that they wanted me to do better than them, to learn from their mistakes. So they motivated me to go [to college] so I could be the first one” (Ana, individual interview, 05/06/2014). In this excerpt, Ana and I were talking about how her closest family members – her mother, grandmother, and a *tia* (aunt) – encouraged her to not make the same mistakes they had made. The “mistakes” relate to not having pursued higher education and, consequently, having to face financial struggles. Ana’s family then encouraged her to “do better than them” by pursuing a college degree. Thus, Ana’s closest family members would use their own life stories of struggle as examples of what not to do or what not to become.

Like Ana, other participants also reproduced narratives about close family members who appeared as examples of what not to do academically. Cecilia, whose family faced very difficult financial struggles during the time of data collection for this study, shared the following narrative:

Since like on my mom’s side nobody went to college – my mom only graduated from high school – it made me push myself. She would always be like “*No sea como yo.*” You know, like actually go farther, don’t stay like me. So I would always have that mindset like there is no option like not going to college, you know. I couldn’t say no. I had to go to college. I mean, I wanted to go to college (Cecilia, individual interview, 10/28/2014).

This passage indicates that Cecilia took her mother’s “*No sea como yo*” story as *consejo* (advice). In an ethnographic study, Delgado-Gaitan (1992) found that *consejos* were largely used by Mexican immigrant parents as a tool to support their children in school. The author highlighted that, even though immigrant parents did not have much knowledge about the American educational system, they supported their children through *consejos* which many times

took the form of powerful narratives about their own struggles in life and the sacrifices they had made to ensure that their children could get an education. Thus, the underlying goal of giving *consejos* was to make sure that children are respectful at school and do their best to succeed academically.

In the same way Cecilia told me about her mother's *consejos*, Nina and Nadia also shared narratives in which their parents would use themselves as examples of what not to do academically-wise. Their stories, however, were somewhat different from Cecilia's and Ana's because Nina's and Nadia's parents were financially stable. In spite of having achieved financial stability, Nina's and Nadia's parents highly encouraged their daughters to pursue further education. Nina told me:

[...] Even though they [her parents] didn't go to school, and they have done good without school, they always tell me that it doesn't happen like that for everyone. Like you need school to succeed kind of. Like my dad didn't go to school but he succeeded in having his business. But he tells us not to depend on anything like that cause it doesn't always happen. Like he tells my brother cause my brother is the one who struggles more. So he says "don't think cause I did it you can. You have to go to school. And you have the resources to go." But he tells us that he always wanted us to go to school, finish and have a career. Like he wants to see us graduate and things like that. They have always told us that it is really important. They tell us that it doesn't matter what we graduate in as long as we graduate (Nina, individual interview, 10/31/2014)

Nina's interview excerpt clearly disrupts the myth that Mexican American parents do not value education. Nina's father, despite not having a college degree, was successful in his own

business – he as a contractor; nonetheless, he discouraged his children to follow his footsteps. Rather, Nina’s father strongly motivated his children to pursue higher education as he believed that this was the safest path to financial stability. By the end of her narrative, Nina stated that regardless her choice of major, her father would be pleased to see his children graduating. This statement might be an even stronger indication that for these Mexican American parents, higher education is valuable in itself and perhaps also a matter of status.

Nadia’s story has similarities with Nina’s. Nadia’s father was a roofer who was also doing well in his roofing business; nevertheless, he and his wife, who were Mexican nationals, highly encouraged their daughter to go to college. Nadia told me:

I mean, I know my parents never had the opportunity to get education cause they had to work or they had to help their parents out. I mean, in Mexico it is totally different. Like you don’t have as much help as you do here. So for me ever since I was little I knew I had to go to college. It was not like “Oh, I might go to college.” It was not an option. I had to. And I had no issue with it. I knew, I mean, I wanted to go to college. But I think my parents have pushed me through it a lot. They always tell me, “Nadia, you need to do this.” I never struggled, thanks to them, I never really struggled for anything ever in my life. But I know they did and a lot. So I want to take advantage of the stuff that I can now, because I know if they had had that opportunity, they would have taken it. But they couldn’t. So I am like why can’t I do it right now if I have all the opportunities? Like, I can do it (Nadia, individual interview, 10/28/2014)

This passage shows Nadia’s recognition of her parents’ effort to provide better opportunities for her and her sisters. Because Nadia’s parents were from Mexico and her

grandmother still lived over there, the young Latina was able to establish meaningful comparisons regarding opportunities in Mexico and the United States. Nadia told me about her parents' struggles in Mexico and later when they were settling in the U.S. Consequently, she saw herself in a position of privilege for being able to focus on school. Nadia also delivered narratives on what not to become based on examples of her own friends who were struggling financially. She said:

[...] a lot of my high school friends had kids and I remember one of my friends, she had a kid when she graduated from high school. And she was gonna start next semester and she got pregnant again. So now she can't do it [...] I was like imagine having a kid. No, like, I see those examples and money is always the problem. And I am like, you see that's why I really wanna be stable like I just don't wanna have issues. (Nadia, individual interview, 12/09/2014).

In the excerpt above Nadia emphasized the importance of financial stability. She had told me that many of her friends saw her as a materialistic person; however, she explained that the main reason she cared about money was because of her parents. The young Latina believed that going to college and having a career would be a means to provide her parents with everything they always dreamed of but still have not accomplished.

Like Nadia, Juan also framed his motivations to go to college around narratives of what he did not want to become. Working at McDonald's during high school, Juan was sure about what he did not want to become – someone who worked for McDonald's for a lifetime. During the focus group interview, when asked about his motivations to attend college, Juan said, "I don't wanna work at MacDonald's for the rest of my life so. And my mom she is like, 'you gotta go to

college. You gotta go to college””(Focus group, 09/19/2014). Inspired by his mother who run a daycare in her own home, the young Latino planned to open his own business in the future. Juan told me that seeing his mom’s success in running her own small daycare was an inspiration for him to open his own car shop in the future. He told me:

[...] I would love to have my own business. Like my mom encourages me to have a business for myself. If you are gonna scream, so scream at yourself cause you are like your own boss. You manage everybody. The money that goes into the business goes through you and then you take out the payments for everybody. I like business management and I wanna have my own shop. That’s what I wanna do. (Juan, individual interview, 10/29/2014).

Juan’s mother was supportive of his future plans; however, she always emphasized that obtaining a college degree was a priority. Knowing about Juan’s interest in cars, Juan’s mother suggested that he get a business degree and then manage his own car shop. He said that his mother offered to help him with the documentation needed for opening a business. Juan’s story reinforces the notion that Mexican parents are very supportive of their children’s educational goals. Even though his mother was able to succeed without a college degree, she stressed that Juan needed to do so.

So far I have discussed how participants’ identities and aspirations for the future were shaped by narratives on what not to do/become. Ana’s, Cecicila’s, Nina’s, Nadia’s and Juan’s narratives had one aspect in common – their families provided them with *consejos* regarding what to do – go to college; and what not to become – someone who struggles financially for not having a college degree. Identity constructions amidst those discourses were at times difficult as

these first generation college students felt the pressure to become examples for their siblings while the students themselves did not have role models for higher education in their immediate families. The next section addresses the different types of conflicts participants faced in negotiating identities.

Tensions in negotiating identities.

During individual and focus group interviews as well as in informal conversations, the theme of becoming a first-generation college student was frequently brought up by the Latino/a youth in this study. Even though students' narratives evidenced their great pride in becoming a role model for higher education, they also indicated anxiety regarding the responsibility this task entailed. In other words, participants clearly expressed wanting to become examples for their younger siblings, and consequently make their parents proud; however, some participants also seemed to feel the pressure to not disappoint their families. In our first interview, Nina talked about the pressure that she felt:

Luciene: So that's another question. Do you think that your parents see you as a good student?

Nina: Yeah, they expect a lot from me. They believe in me. They know that I will do good in college and in my future. It is a big pressure, I think.

Luciene: So they have high expectations?

Nina: Uh-um. (Nina, individual interview, 05/19/2014).

In the excerpt above Nina mentioned the pressure that she felt regarding meeting her parents' high expectations. Her parents knew that she had always been a good student, therefore

they expected her to continue being a good student and role model in college. Nadia seemed to feel the same way as Nina:

It was not like, “Oh, I might go to college.” It was not an option. I had to. And I had no issue with it. I knew, I mean, I wanted to go to college. But I think my parents have pushed me through it a lot. They always tell me “Nadia, you need to do this.” I never struggled, thanks to them, I never really struggled for anything ever in my life (Nadia, individual interview, 10/28/2014).

In this passage Nadia emphasized that, for her, college was never an option; it was a fact. Additionally, she stated that her parents have “pushed [her] through it a lot.” Nadia’s narrative suggests that she felt a certain amount of pressure mainly because her parents always provided for her; therefore, going to college and performing well was seen as both a privilege and an obligation at the same time. The pressure to keep up with family expectations and continue being role models for siblings was also found in previous research with first-generation college Latina students (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Apparently, in Nina’s and Nadia’s narratives there is an implicit fear of not meeting their family expectations and eventually becoming examples of what not to do (examples not to be followed). Perhaps, the fear of not succeeding is more evident in Natalia’s account of why graduating from college was a priority for her:

It is cause my mom and my dad they have this thing that they compare us to each other and I get mad when they compare me to my brother sometimes. I got nothing to do with my brothers. I wanna show them that I am not like them cause both of them didn’t graduate with their class; then they didn’t go to college. They don’t like working. (Natalia, interview, 25/10/2014)

In this excerpt, Natalia expressed her frustration for being compared to her brothers. Natalia constructed herself in complete opposition to her brothers who she said did not graduate with their classes in high school, did not go to college, and did not like to work. Natalia, on the other hand, graduated on time, started working at the age of 16, and was very committed to going to college to pursue a degree in business. Thus, Natalia's determination to go to college not only was linked to her belief that a college degree would give her better opportunities in life but it also meant that she strongly rejected being positioned like her brothers. Julie delivered a similar narrative when we talked about her motivations to go to college. She said, "[...] I know my sister didn't graduate [with her class from high school] and I'm not that type of person. I wanna do things right" (Julie, individual interview, 05/12/2014). Like Natalia, Julie constructed herself in opposition to her sister who did not graduate with her class and did not go to college. For Julie, her sister was an example of what not to do/become.

It is important to point out that Julie's entire life story was very different from the other participants' in many ways; however, the most significant aspect that seemed to impact her identity construction was her family structure. As previously mentioned, she was raised by her grandmother in Texas because she was living and working in Santa Fe, NM, as a caretaker. Julie's father had been deported to Mexico due to accusations of living in the U.S. without documentation and drug dealing. As I asked Julie about people who had influenced her decision to go to college, she volunteered another narrative on what she did not to become:

My mom didn't say to go to college, but to do whatever is best for me. To be honest, I don't want to be like my mom or like my dad. I don't want to get deported, I mean, I don't want to do drugs or I don't wanna have to be living away from my family just to work on another job or be struggling with money, you know. So I want to

do something on my own where I don't have to rely on people or depend on people, you now. That's how I see it. (Julie, individual interview, 11/07/2014).

The opening sentence in Julie's narrative suggests that the young Latina had no guidance from her mother in relation to higher education. Julie was a clear example of someone who, perhaps for lack of role models, did not know what she wanted to become. Because of the struggles Julie faced within her nuclear family, her narratives would consistently gravitate towards what not to become. As our conversation about college continued, Julie told me that college had not been an option for her until I started conducting my research at Southwest High School. She said:

[...] So I wasn't going [to college] until you came up and you started to introduce yourself, and later on you told us how you could help students to go into college and stuff like that, you know. And that's how I started to...I liked it. (Julie, individual interview, 11/07/2014)

In this excerpt Julie referred to the day I introduced this research study to her class. I explained to them what the project involved and said that I would provide them assistance with scholarship essays and college writing assignments. Feeling motivated by the support I was offering, Julie decided that she wanted to go to college and showed great enthusiasm about it. As Julie missed the day of class in which I formally introduced the study, she kept reminding me to bring the informed consent for her guardian to sign so that she could participate in this study. She also asked me if I would be able to provide assistance to students throughout their four years of college and I replied as long as I was around I would be glad to do that (Field notes, 04/02/2014).

During my data collection in the high school, whenever students had a break from classes, I sat down with Julie and researched possible career choices, scholarships, and financial aid. During my conversations with the student, I realized that she had very limited knowledge about what different types of professionals do, and she had no idea about what profession she would like to have. In spite of that, Julie was certain about going to college and becoming a role model for her younger siblings. In informal conversations, Julie reinforced her identity in opposition to her sister. She told me that the reason her sister did not graduate from high school and did not pursue further education was because she had gotten pregnant in her senior year. Even though Julie had a good relationship with her sister, she always mentioned that she did not want to do like her.

Julie's and Natalia's narratives on how they did not want to become like their older siblings are different from Nina's and Nadia's as they were not marked by the pressure to meet family members' expectations. Although both Julie and Natalia also wanted to become examples in their families, the tensions around their identities constructions can be better understood if connections between the micro and macro level are established. From the perspective of social practice theory, identities are constructed through engagement with local practices, however, those practices are interwoven with larger social factors or socio-historical struggles, as Holland and Lave (2009) put it. Socio-historical struggles, the authors explain, are the product (and also produce) one's positioning in relation to others in society. In this regard, marginalized groups such as women, LGBT people, Blacks, Latino/as, among many other groups are marked by socio-historical struggles. The students in this study are marked by the struggles of being Latino/as in the U.S. context. Although they vary in socioeconomic and immigration status, all of

them will be first-generation college students. All these positionings intersect and shape the experiences of all youth in this study in particular ways.

Natalia's and Julie's conflicts in identity constructions had some distinctions in comparison to the other participants. Those two Latinas seemed to lack what the other participants repeatedly reported: emotional support from their parents and/or guardians. Even though Natalia and Julie reported that their parents were happy about their decisions to attend college, they, unlike the other participants, were not constantly exposed to discourses that emphasized the importance of going to college. Both Natalia and Julie wanted to become role models, as they told me; however, for them, these motivations were not as much nurtured in the space of home. In our first interview, I asked Natalia if her parents influenced her to go to college:

Luciene: And you would say that it was mostly in school that you had this influence? And at home? Did your parents ever say anything about college?

Natalia: I think that they would have. They would have liked me to keep on going with my studies. Since that now they know that I am going to college, they are excited. (Natalia, individual interview, 05/07/2014)

Natalia's response was vague, hypothetical. It seems that she did not have explicit encouragement from her parents to go to college; however, her parents were happy about her decision. In our second interview, Natalia said:

I think that's the thing with my parents. Like I was expecting them to be a little bit more excited cause my older brothers didn't go to college but, I mean, they were

excited for a little while. After a while they were like “oh, you go to college”

(Individual interview, 02/09/2015).

In the excerpt above Natalia talked about how she would like her parents to show more excitement about her being in college. In informal conversations, Natalia told me that she would like her parents to be more explicit about their feelings and thoughts. In spite of not having explicit emotional support from her parents, Natalia felt that her family was proud of her and acknowledged other types of support from them. She mentioned her mother lending her the car to go to college and her brother occasionally giving her a ride or money to help with school expenses.

To conclude this section, all participants in this study faced the tensions of being the first in their families to go to college. They feared not being able to accomplish the task of becoming role models and, instead, become examples of what not to do. In their households, Nina, Nadia, Ana, Cecilia, and Juan, were constantly exposed to discourses on what to do and what not to do in terms of educational and career goals. At the same time these discourses were *consejos* (nurturing advice) that seemed to motivate these youth, they produced a certain amount of pressure as reported by Nadia and Nina. Julie and Natalia were not exposed to such discourses at home, but their identity constructions were impacted by distinctive aspects in their family dynamics. Other factors linked to historical struggles, which participants may not be aware of, also impacted their identity constructions as first-generation college students. Ethnicity, immigration status, social class, among many other aspects, may limit one’s possibilities of self-authoring in a given society; however, participants’ determination to pursue a college degree shows that, despite constraints, social actors are able to improvise.

Summary

This chapter explored Latino/a youth's identity constructions out-of-school. The first half of the chapter shed light on how identities were shaped through engagement with material artifacts such as fiction books, Christian novels, the bible, diaries, magazines, and newspaper articles. Sometimes, interactions with those materials would be mediated by technology. The second half of this chapter analyzed the role of symbolic artifacts – discourses or powerful narratives in the form of *consejos* (advice) - in shaping students' aspirations for college identities. The most significant findings in this chapter relate to students' active constructions of selves through engagement with material and symbolic artifacts. In the same way they actively re-invented their identities through literacy practices, they also did so by taking up the positioning as role models for higher education. Even though these students had to deal with the pressures that this task entails, they were determined to become the first in their families to sit in a college classroom thus setting an example for their younger siblings.

The next chapter will explore how identity constructions were fostered or constrained in engagement with the academic literacies in the context of participants' high school.

Chapter 5: The Figured World of the High School

Introduction

The previous chapter showed how symbolic and material artifacts mediated Latino/a youth identity constructions outside schools. Findings revealed that Latino/a youth's identities were shaped by active engagement with "old" and "new" literacies. Additionally, their academic aspirations seemed to be influenced by discourses that positioned them as role models in the space of home. In this chapter, I turn to the analysis of participants' identity constructions and negotiations within the figured world of senior English classes at Southwest High School.

Schools can be thought of as figured worlds regulated by certain practices that do not necessarily reflect students' out of school ways of knowing. For youth, identity constructions through engagement with the literacy practices of school can be challenging considering that school curricula generally do not reflect their hybrid identities (Moje, 2004; Garcia, 2009). In particular, language minoritized youth may find it difficult to participate in the discourses of schools which can be seen as figured worlds largely structured by English monolingual, often Standard English, paper-based literacy practices (the New London Group, 1996). Because of the gap between in and out-of-school literacies, youth, especially culturally and language minoritized youth, are often positioned as students who lack skills or are not interested in learning. In any given figured world, individuals draw on cultural resources available to them to reposition themselves (Holland & Lave, 2009); nonetheless, this leads us back to the question: what counts as cultural resources in more regulated figured worlds such as schools? This question is at the heart of curriculum planning and instruction.

Landon Beyer and Michael Apple (1998) argue that curriculum decisions are always complex because they encompass a number of issues such as: (a) Epistemological – What should

count as knowledge? (b) Political – Who controls the distribution of knowledge? (c) Economic – How is the control of knowledge linked to the existing and unequal distribution of power, goods, and services in society? (d) Ideological – What knowledge is of most worth? (e) Aesthetic – How do we link the curriculum knowledge to the biography and personal meanings of the student? (Beyer & Apple, 1998, p. 5). Sleeter (2005) also addresses some of these questions when discussing curriculum and hidden curriculum in schools. Sleeter (2005) draws on Beyer and Liston's (1996) definition of curriculum:

Curriculum is the centerpiece of educational activity. It includes the formal, overt knowledge that is central to the activities of teaching, as well as more tacit, subliminal messages – transmitted through the processes of acting and interacting within a particular kind of institution – that foster the inculcation of particular values, attitudes, and dispositions (Beyer & Liston, 1996, as cited in Sleeter, 2005, p. 10).

This definition of curriculum includes what is known as “hidden curriculum”, which refers to knowledge, beliefs, and values that are, intentionally or not, transferred to students during the learning process. Questions around what is explicitly and implicitly taught in schools become even more controversial as the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students drastically increases. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have argued that schools commit symbolic violence by imposing dominant class culture and language on students from diverse backgrounds. Nonetheless, denying minoritized students access to the culture of power as a form of resistance could be highly detrimental to students themselves as it would considerably limit their educational and career opportunities (Delpit, 1988).

Delpit (1988) makes the case that, in order for minoritized students to be able to critique and transform the culture of power, they “must be taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life” (p. 296). Academic literacies, as representative of the culture of power, are tools for oppression when imposed on students without regard for their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Janks, 2000; Moje, 2007). Conversely, the strategic use of students’ hybrid discourses (their languages and linguistic varieties and their multimodal literacy practices) as resources for appropriating academic discourses is productive and socially just (Moje, 2007). Appropriating the culture of power and learning how to negotiate literacies and identities is vital for minoritized students’ to successfully navigate postsecondary institutions.

The questions of power underlying curriculum design and implementation are critical for the development of this chapter which examines how linguistically minoritized youth in the borderlands negotiate knowledge and identities within the traditional structure of formal learning environments. Thus, this chapter focuses on answering the following questions: In the space of senior English classes, (a) How do students negotiate literacies and identities? What counts as resources for Latino/youth to re-author their literate selves? (b) What types of discourses and practices seem to foster or constrain students’ aspirations to become college students?

This chapter is organized as follows: First, I explore issues regarding the English IV curriculum design at Southwest High; then I examine how the curriculum was implemented in the classroom. Specifically, I will compare and contrast two major activities conducted in the English classes during my data collection: the reading of *Frankenstein*, which was considered a bad experience by the English teachers, and the development of a mini-research paper, deemed a success by the participating teachers and students in this study. My goal in describing these two activities is to demonstrate how literacy and identities are impacted by the power relations in Ms.

Garcia's and Ms. Martinez's classrooms. I must note that, in this chapter, my use of the term "activity" is tied to Barton and Hamilton's (2000) notion of literacy events, which are embedded in literacy practices. Specifically, the authors posit that, "Literacy practices are general cultural ways of utilizing written language [...] literacy practices are what people do with literacy" (p. 7). Barton and Hamilton (2000) go on to explain that, because literacy practices involve beliefs, values, feelings, and social relationships, they are not observable unit of analysis. Thus, in order to understand and theorize about the literacy practices of a group, researchers focus on literacy events which are "activities where literacy has a role" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). A literacy event then highlights the situated/contextual nature of literacy – individuals engaged in a literacy event typically draw on a range of semiotic systems (i.e. oral language, maps, graphs, and pictures) to make sense of a written text. Thus, my use of the term "activity" in this chapter refers to observable, situated events where literacy has a clear purpose. These activities are the in-class reading of the British novel *Frankenstein* and the writing of a research paper.

After analyzing the production of identities during the reading of the novel and the writing of the research paper, I focus on other discourses and practices that seemed to foster (or not) a college-going culture among students.

Southwest High School Context

Southwest High School (SHS) and an early college high school are the only two high schools serving youth in the district where this study took place. Located right across SHS, is one of the campuses of a local community college where many of the high school students in the district choose to start their undergraduate coursework. As in many parts of the country, linguistically and culturally diverse students, notably Latino/as, start their postsecondary studies in community colleges because of their open access policy and low cost as compared to four-

year higher education institutions. Four of the participants in this study, Cecilia, Ana, Juan, and Nadia, started their postsecondary education in the local community college where their high school English teacher and participant in this study, Ms. Martinez, taught First-Year Composition classes.

Southwest High school offers students the opportunity to obtain college credit by taking and passing end of course exams for Advanced Placement (AP) courses in English, Social Studies, Math, Science, Art, and Foreign Language. In addition to the 16 AP classes offered in 2014, five early admissions courses (dual credit courses) were taught in conjunction with the local community college allowing students to earn high school and college credit in the core content areas. In order for a student to be accepted into a specific AP or dual credit class, he or she must be recommended by their previous teacher in that content area. At Southwest High, classes that are “at grade level”, that meaning not remedial or Advanced, are called on-level classes.

The English department and on-level English IV curriculum.

During the second week of January 2014, while still in the process of negotiating access to English classes at SHS, I met with the head of the English Department, Ms. Rodriguez, who was very welcoming. She showed me the school offices, library, classroom and the hallway, which was decorated with drawings and messages supporting a healthy environment filled with love, kindness, and friendship as opposed to hatred, bullying, and discrimination. There was also a large glass window through which I could see pictures of students who participated in the school clubs and were awarded in competitions. As we walked along the school hallway, Ms. Rodriguez explained that the English Department was composed of 16 teachers, and knowing

about my interest in on-level English IV classes, she suggested that I contacted Ms. Garcia and Ms. Martinez.

I first contacted Ms. Garcia and Ms. Martinez through e-mail and scheduled a meeting. Both teachers were very welcoming and showed genuine interest in participating in the study. The teachers were in charge of all on-level English IV classes encompassing over 300 students. Ms. Garcia had been an early childhood teacher for five years but after becoming a mother, she decided to take time off to raise her daughter. Ten years later, in December 2013, Ms. Garcia went back to teaching secondary level students at SHS. Like Ms. Garcia, Ms. Martinez was also new to Southwest High School. After having taught English for five years at a high school located in another district, Ms. Martinez started teaching at SHS in fall 2013, the same time when the current principal took charge of the school administration.

Ms. Martinez had been responsible for planning the curriculum for on-level English IV classes at the SHS. She had received some guidance from the school coach who showed her the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and explained that the curriculum content should be divided into a six-week planning format. In our interview, Ms. Martinez told me that she felt free to plan the English IV curriculum. She said:

I was familiar with the textbooks from my previous school. We had just adopted the same books. I was very familiar with them. They are great resources. I am very lucky. In English 4, I have complete freedom to teach whatever I would like. So at the same time it is combined with college prep and then stuff like that, too. We had to do Apply Texas at the beginning of the year. So they were like “Ok. You have Apply Texas. Make them write the essays.” So it was my first four weeks of school here. Having them do the

Apply Texas essays. They didn't like me very much because we were writing a lot. So, that was a lot (Ms. Martinez, interview, 06/19/2014).

The "complete freedom", as Ms. Martinez put it, for curriculum planning involved her choice of textbooks, decisions on what types of activities should be done and how they should be done. Thus, in the beginning of the year she had students apply for Texas public colleges and universities through the "Apply Texas" website. Ms. Martinez also told me that she did not feel constrained by high-stakes testing as most of her current students, except for a few ELLs, had passed those tests in their junior year. The teacher explained that senior students at SHS were the last group taking the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) before a total switch to State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR).

The Challenges of Teaching at SHS: Lack of Material Resources and Low Expectations

Although Ms. Martinez reported having "complete freedom" for curriculum design and implementation, such freedom seemed to be constrained by limited access to material resources and low expectations on the part of the school community. Ms. Martinez described her experience teaching at SHS as "a real eye-opener" as she was used to having much more access to material resources in the middle-class high school where she previously taught which was located in a nearby district. In the interviews, both teachers highlighted that many students in the school did not own a computer and a printer, or have internet access from home. Lack of material resources was also a problem in the school. When asked if the students had enough access to technology in the school, Ms. Garcia answered:

[...] Those computers are terrible and don't work very well, or don't connect to the internet, and so it takes forever for the kids to log on because they have to connect to the blue cord, which is the hardwired internet. It is just a disaster. And in my room I only

had one computer. So I couldn't even have four or five or six kids typing or looking up information in my room. So I really don't think that they have enough access to the computers and the ones that get the most access are the lower level classes that are testing grades because they work like they have little programs that help prepare the kids for the test (Ms. Garcia, interview, 06/20/2014).

Ms. Garcia's excerpt emphasizes the limitations related to technology in the school. As she explained, there was only one computer in the classrooms, thus any activity that required the use of computers had to be held in the school library; nonetheless, the computer libraries, besides having problems, were rarely available for purposes other than training for standardized tests. Ms. Martinez shared the same view as Ms. Garcia in relation to access to technology in the school. She said:

We have the computer labs when it's available. I don't even know how Ms. Garcia and I got the time in the library [to have students work on their research paper] cause we kind of, we plan by six-week period basically. So we had to figure it out. I don't even know how we got that because those were basically the two places – the computer labs, or the CT teacher have labs but they teach their classes in there so it was hard [...] We had to share. I mean, not that I mind sharing with Mrs. Watts but we had to share sometimes and there was. I mean, we had about 20 computers outside and it's not enough for 40 kids so. (Ms. Martinez, interview, 06/19/2014).

In the excerpt above Ms. Martinez reflected on how difficult it was to have students work on their research paper by having them share one computer in the school library. In addition to limited access to technology, in the interview, Ms. Garcia expressed frustration regarding the

limited number of textbooks and novels for students to read. For the teacher, the lack of material resources in the school reflected the school administration's low expectations for the students.

She said:

I see in our school a culture of treating the kids like babies because we do not have very high expectations for them. We do not demand excellence from them. I don't know if you noticed but there are no textbooks for the children to take home. So none of the kids takes the textbooks home which to me seems terribly ridiculous. And they say "Oh, we don't have enough books. We don't have walkers but every other school in the world they can take the book home. And so I don't like that and I feel that the administration and other people don't have very high expectations for students' performance sometimes. Like, you know, they bend over backwards for them, which is good; it helps them pass, but I mean, where else in the world do they do that for you? Nowhere. So I don't really like that. So I try to keep very high expectations in my own classroom (Ms. Garcia, interview, 06/20/2014)

Similarly to Ms. Garcia, Ms. Martinez also pointed to low expectations as a problem in the school community. In the interview, she shared:

[...] From what I have seen, students they also have low expectations for themselves, but some of the parents weren't really supportive with meeting educational goals and things like that. They were pretty much content with "My child is not going to college so why do they have to do these types of assignments?" So that is some of the reasons I have been experiencing it. They are not used to changes as someone coming here with big ideas and giving their

children big ideas. Parents were intimidated by that [...] they felt very intimidated by me and they didn't like the big ideas, but I think that this was the new administration. They also came with very big ideas and it's helping with changing the culture of the school (Ms. Martinez, interview, 06/19/2014).

In the excerpt above, Ms. Martinez described how some parents felt intimidated by her "big ideas" such as the research paper assignment that her senior-level students were required to do. The teacher also expressed hopes that the new school administration would change "the culture of the school." Ms. Martinez went on to describe how she held very high expectations for her students and used her creativity to overcome obstacles. For example, she told me that in the first half of the academic year, she had students read *Macbeth* and produce a graphic novel adapted from the book. For the graphic novel, the students were encouraged to use their imagination incorporating cartoon characters such as *The Simpsons* or real life TV stars. Ms. Martinez told me:

[...] I know that these kids don't have access to a lot of technological resources and color printers, and things like that. I said "Ok, so I want you to draw but if you want to do above and beyond, and take it to another level, you can do that." And I was very surprised. Maybe at least one group per class actually drew everything out. Everybody else was cutting their pictures. It was really awesome to see that. And I could tell they understood the play because they had to put it together (Interview, 06/19/2014).

Ms. Martinez, in the above passage, explained how she overcame the scarcity of resources by engaging students in a creative task and meaningful learning. For the second half of the semester, during my data collection in the school, Ms. Martinez planned two major activities: The reading of the book *Frankenstein*, followed by a small project as an assessment tool; and the

writing of a research paper. Both Ms. Martinez and Ms. Garcia considered the reading of the novel and the small project as not successful. On the other hand, they were very happy with the outcomes of the research paper which, according to both of them, exceeded their expectations.

In the following sections, I explore the reading of the book *Frankenstein* and the writing of the research paper as activities that were central to the production of identities. As we will see, the lack of material resources was indeed an issue affecting curriculum and instruction in ways that seemed to contribute to students' disengagement from the class content. Underlying the evident problem of lack of material resources, however, was another issue: students' funds of knowledge, which made up their multiliterate identities, remained, in many occasions, as untapped resources. Thus the subsequent sections will examine how classroom activities, constrained by a number of factors including lack of material resources and power relations, produced different types of positionings.

The Silent Reading of *Frankenstein*

During my first weeks of data collection at Southwest High, from January 21st to February 24th, 2014, the on-level English IV students were engaged in the reading of the British novel *Frankenstein*, an activity that had started in the second week of classes. It took about 25 days for the book reading to be completed during the English classes, which took place from Monday through Friday and lasted 45 minutes. As previously noted, the number of books was limited, therefore students had to do the reading of entire novels during class time. For each class meeting, the teachers had the objectives of the class written on the left-hand corner of the white boards. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show how Ms. Garcia and Ms. Martinez organized the class objectives on the white board.

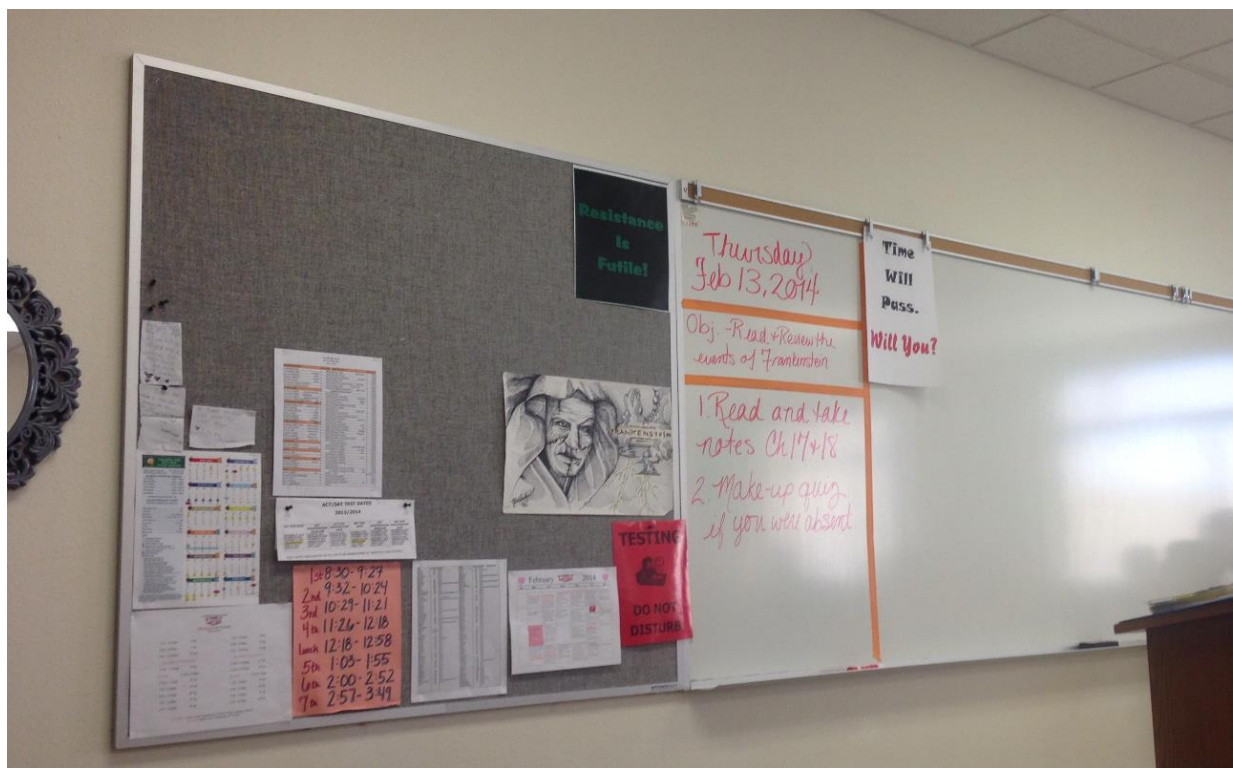


Figure 5.1. Ms. Garcia's classroom (field notes, 02/13/2014)

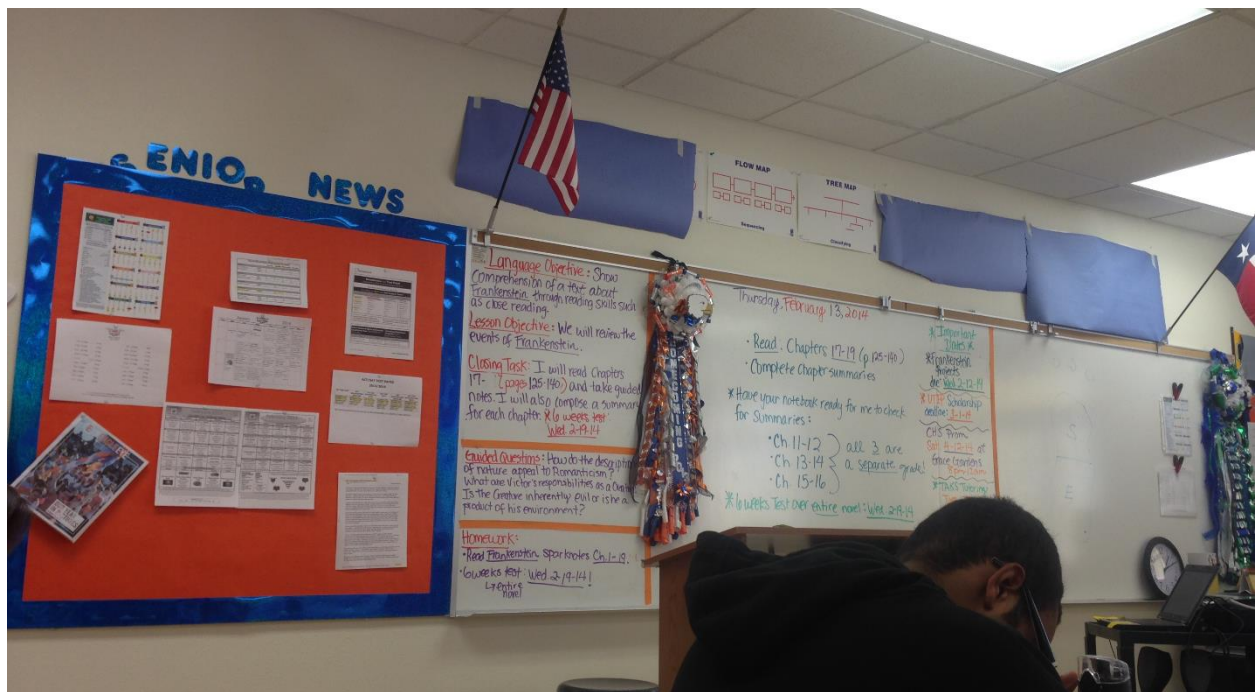


Figure 5.2. Ms. Martinez's classroom (field notes, 02/13/2014)

The pictures above, which were taken on the same day, highlight differences in Ms. Garcia's and Ms. Martinez's classroom settings. Ms. Garcia's classroom had few decorations and the instructions for each class were written in a short, simplified manner. On the other hand, Ms. Martinez's classroom was decorated with flags, ribbons and, in the back of the classroom, pennants from different universities such as Borderland University (BU), Saint Louis University, and Notre Dame University. There were also visuals such as graphic organizers. Besides adding more visuals to her classroom environment, Ms. Martinez was more detailed when writing the objectives of each class on the white board. The teacher would break the objectives down into language and lesson objectives. On her white board, there was also a space for guided questions which helped students to read the assigned chapters of the novel with a specific purpose in mind.

In both Ms. Garcia's and Ms. Martinez's English classes, the students usually read one or two chapters per class period, and the reading was accompanied by the audio recording of the book. Either in the beginning or by the end of the class, the students were given a worksheet, as shown in figure 5.3, with questions based on the assigned chapters. During the reading, Ms. Garcia would be sitting at her desk grading assignments or using the computer. Typically, at the end of a chapter reading, the teacher asked basic comprehension questions and then proceeded to orally summarize the chapter events. In one occasion, following the reading of chapter 6, Ms. Garcia asked her students, "Who is the character that is introduced in the chapter?" Even though it was a simple comprehension question, no student was able to answer it correctly. The teacher then summarized the chapter while most students listened to it without taking any notes or trying to answer the questions in the worksheet. As the bell rang, the students quickly left the classroom (Field notes, 02/06/2014).

As for Ms. Martinez, during the silent reading of the novel, the teacher would be standing most of the time. She would be close to the DVD player silently reading the book as well. At times the teacher stopped the audio in the middle of a chapter to either ask comprehension questions or draw students' attention to important events. After the reading of an entire chapter, if time permitted, Ms. Martinez's would guide students through the questions in the worksheet. Specifically, she would ask the questions from the worksheet and a few students, usually the same ones, would verbally answer them while all the students took notes. Figure 5.3 shows the sample of a worksheet based on chapter 10 of *Frankenstein*:

<p>Chapter Ten (page 81)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Locate a quote that conveys the Romantic belief in nature as a healing force.2. Compare Shelley's description of the setting to Victor's mood.3. Explain how the creature offers an ultimatum to Victor.4. Generalize how the creature blames humanity for his behavior.
--

Figure 5.3. Worksheet for comprehension of *Frankenstein*

By the end of the class, both Ms. Garcia and Ms. Martinez would remind the students that they could check out the novel and take it home for two days, if they wanted to. Students were, in both classes, highly encouraged to access the *Sparknotes* website in order to better understand the novel. Finally, the teachers also encouraged students to take the weekly extra credit opportunity which required them to write the definitions of three difficult words from the novel. All the words chosen by the teachers were taken from a glossary list found at the back of the novel, thus all students had to do was copy the definitions from the glossary to get 20 points weekly.

This section focused on describing the instructional approaches used by the two participating teachers to the reading of the novel *Frankenstein*. Aligned with the TEKS (2008), the English IV curriculum at SHS focused on the reading of British literature and the comprehension questions, as shown in figure 5.3, were meant to facilitate text comprehension and develop students' analytical skills. Nevertheless, it was difficult to know if the class objectives were being accomplished because the instructional approaches used by Ms. Martinez's and Ms. Garcia's did not allow for much interaction among the students. Even though the lack of material resources, which led to the reading of the book during class time, impacted instruction, it did not seem to be the only pedagogical issue in the senior English classes.

Both Ms. Martinez's and Ms. Garcia's classes, were structured around English monolingual literacy practices sustained by directive instruction, a teacher-centered instructional method. Tatum, Wold and Elish-Piper (2009) identify the directive instructional method as one of the reasons secondary students will reject the reading of texts from the English canon. The authors stress that such texts have the potential to generate meaningful reflections if appropriate strategies are applied. Particularly important during the reading of literary work, the authors argue, is to have students consider "universal questions" (overarching questions) such as "Who am I?" and "Who do I wish to be?" These questions are meant to lead students to critically analyze how aspects of their own identities intersect (or not) with characters from texts written in different times in history. Unfortunately, the on-level English IV classes at Southwest High school not only lacked material resources but also lacked effective instructional methods that could allow students to make text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. In the next section, I examine how students, with their hybrid identities, responded to the reading of upper-middle class British literature.

Artifacts producing positionings.

The previous section focused on describing the pedagogical approaches that structured the activity of in-class book reading. Without appropriate reading strategies to afford connections with the text, many students in the English classes I observed seemed to be disengaged from the reading of *Frankenstein*. At that point of my data collection in the school, I had not yet recruited participants for the study; therefore, what follows are general descriptions and analysis of examples of positionings during the reading activity. I will start by analyzing how students were positioned by the reading activity mediated by material and symbolic artifacts.

Ms. Garcia's and Ms. Martinez's pedagogical approaches to the novel, most of the time, positioned students as passive learners or knowledge consumers, not leaving much room for negotiation of meanings and co-construction of knowledge. Within the hierarchical classroom structure, the teachers did most of the talk and preferred to maintain classroom interactions in the format of teacher's questions and students' answers, rather than having students interact among themselves. The class structure seemed to limit students' possibilities of learning and identity constructions as they were not encouraged to draw on their out-of-school discourses in order to make sense of the text. Students who had difficulty with reading, like Julie, and ELLs may have found it even more challenging to connect with 19th century British literature.

Constrained by the class structure, some students showed small acts of resistance. A few students engaged in "unofficial" literacy practices (Dyson, 2003) such as texting, Facebooking, and passing notes to one another. One student in Ms. Garcia's class would bring a graphic novel and secretly read it during every class meeting. Several students in Ms. Garcia's class, in a low tone, talked to peers next to them during the book reading; a few others seemed to be

sleeping with their heads laying on their desks (Field notes, 02/06/2014; 02/13/2014). Concerned about the low performance in her classes, Ms. Garcia told students that when their parents came to the school to ask why their kids were failing she would say, “Your child failed because he was sleeping in class, got bad grades, and didn’t turn in his work” (02/13/2014).

Ms. Martinez, on the other hand, was stricter about discipline in her class thus, explicit forms of resistance to the class structure such as using cell phones, sleeping, or talking during class, were rare. Instead, some students stared out the window. One student, who was really good at drawing, would draw cartoon characters. A few times, two students were told off by Ms. Martinez as they talked and giggled during the class reading. When I learned that these two students were classified as ELLs, their disruptive behavior seemed to be resistance to the fact that they were not provided with the support they needed to comprehend the novel. Even though the school had ESL tutors who would either walk into the classroom or pull ELLs out of the classroom, both Ms. Garcia and Ms. Martinez believed that ELLs did not have enough support to develop academic literacies. Both teachers were bilingual but they used English to address the entire class. Ms. Martinez told me she grew up in a monolingual household and nowadays she only uses Spanish to talk to students’ parents. Ms. Garcia used Spanish to translate assignment instructions for two ELLs who were at very early stages of developing the second language.

Although the teaching approaches to *Frankenstein* were typically around teachers’ questions followed by answers from individual students, I had the opportunity to observe a particular class that stood out for the amount of time invested in discussing the chapters and the scaffolding provided by the teacher. The class was taught by Ms. Martinez and was based on the chapters 15 and 16 of *Frankenstein*. Before the reading, the teacher told students to pay attention to a reference to *Paradise Lost* in chapter 15. She regularly stopped the audio recording to check

that students were following the narrative. After the silent reading of chapters 15 and 16, which focused on the themes of social identity, marginalization, and loneliness, the teacher posed the question, “Do we need other people to survive?” One student answered, “No.” Ms. Martinez then encouraged the student to elaborate on her response and soon many other students joined the discussion. Cecilia asked: “Why did Victor Frankenstein create the creature so ugly?” The teacher replied, “That’s a good question. Perhaps, the ugliness of the creature reflects how Victor felt inside.” To close the discussion, Ms. Martinez told students that loneliness is a central theme in *Frankenstein*. She also told them she was very pleased with their participation during that class (field notes, 02/10/2014). That particular class was a good example of how teachers can promote engagement and critical thinking by scaffolding text-to-self and text-to-world connections. The next section delves deeper into literacies and identities by exploring how students made sense of *Frankenstein*.

Students’ connections with *Frankenstein*.

As an observer during the silent reading of *Frankenstein*, I wondered to which extent students were comprehending and enjoying the novel. As the six-week activity came to an end and I could fully take the role of participant-observer, thus interacting more with the students. At that point, I noticed that a few students had very little understanding of the novel; nevertheless, interviews revealed that participants in this study comprehended the plot, and many of these students were able to make meaningful text-to-self and text-to-world connections. The particular class, taught by Ms. Martinez, in which students had the opportunity to actively participate in discussions about the novel apparently had a very positive impact on students’ literate identities. In the interviews, all of the students told me that they had actually enjoyed the reading of the

novel. Juan demonstrated excitement about the book. He told me that *Frankenstein* had been the most interesting book he had ever read.

Luciene: What was the most interesting book you ever read?

Juan: *Frankenstein*

Luciene: Did you enjoy it?

Juan: I liked it. It was kind of confusing but I liked it. It was a good story.

Luciene: So this is the kind of story that you identify with? Horror or scientific fiction stories?

Juan: Yeah, well it was pretty confusing because it went from one part of time and then went to another one. So it was kind of confusing but it was ok. And actually the first book I ever read from cover to cover cause I read books but after one or two chapters into the book I just stop reading. (Juan, individual interview, 05/07/2014).

Even though throughout this study Juan positioned himself as “lazy” and as someone who doesn’t like to read, the student actively engaged in the reading of the novel not only by paying attention in class but also by checking out the book so that he could read the chapters in advance. Checking out books was not a common practice among students as the teachers would emphasize the use of *Sparknotes* for summaries and analysis of the novel.

Cecilia, Nina, Natalia, and Nadia, highlighted the theme of marginalization pointing out how people can be mean to others. Below are some interview excerpts that show students’ personal connections with the book:

It [*Frankenstein*] was really good because it taught me like that you just have to be yourself. I mean, the creature wasn’t accepted into society and he had to deal with other people making fun of him and being mean to him, but at the end he still got what he

wanted. He ended up not being as happy but. It was a really good book (Cecilia, individual interview, 05/20/2014).

I really liked that book actually. I thought it would be different like scary or something but I really liked it. I liked how they used the monster to make him feel like us when we feel like not part of something [...] cause there is people who feel like they don't fit in with people or something, and we could be mean to other people without noticing how much we affect them. I really liked it. It is a really nice book (Nina, individual interview, 05/19/2014).

I realized that I can be mean at times too. Then, I see other people being mean, and I wouldn't see that before. I'd be like, you know, you get used to it. You get used to people being judgmental. And then when you read something like that it's like I need to change something (Nadia, individual interview, 05/09/2014).

The excerpts above show that Cecilia, Nina and Nadia were able to make very meaningful connections related to social identity issues. Cecilia learned that she had to be herself; Nina and Nadia highlighted that society tends to discriminate or “otherize” people. Most importantly, both Nina and Nadia were self-critical about the ways they might have treated others. Nina said, “We could be mean to other people without noticing how much we affect them.” Realizing, through the reading of *Frankenstein*, that she could be mean to others, Nadia said, “I need to change something.” In the interview, Nadia also student also remembered the times when she experienced discrimination in middle school for being overweight.

Students' narratives are powerful examples of how literacies and identities are deeply intertwined. The novel was a material artifact mediating identity constructions as it helped to

raise students' awareness of who they are in relation to others, and what they need to change in order to be more inclusive and respectful of diverse identities. It is important to note that these critical connections with the reading seemed to have been enabled in Ms. Martinez's class, particularly the one in which students were encouraged to reflect and discuss the text. That class was an example of how teachers can foster third spaces, or zones of proximal development, in their classrooms (Gutierrez et al., 1999). As students were encouraged to critically reflect on the most relevant themes in *Frankenstein*, they could author themselves as "active/interested learners." In classes where students, in general, were not given the chance to actively engage with the reading, some forms of resistance occurred, thus positioning them as "uninterested", "disruptive", "lazy", and so on. The next section explores the resources participants drew on in order to better comprehend the novel.

Resources for the comprehension of *Frankenstein*.

Most of the participants reported that they did not find the reading of *Frankenstein* difficult. The time shifts in the narrative were confusing for Juan and Ana, but they thought that Ms. Martinez provided good support for them to comprehend those shifts. After reading each chapter, the students checked the *SparkNotes* website to be sure that they understood the story well. Ana said, "I would read the chapter first and then use *SparkNotes* to get it" (individual interview, 05/06/2014). Interestingly, Juan, the self-identified "non-reader", told me that he would read the chapter twice before accessing *SparkNotes*:

Actually, I had to read it like a couple of times. Like the chapters, after finishing reading it in class, I would take it home and I would read it again. And remember the website that Ms. Martinez gave us? The *SparkNotes*? I would actually go in there and read like a little

summary of the chapter, so I could understand way better cause it was kind of confusing, honestly. (Juan, individual interview, 05/07/2014)

Besides reading the chapters twice and accessing *Sparknotes*, Juan also told me that, for comprehension of vocabulary, he relied on the glossary in the back of the novel. Nina also relied on the glossary in the novel to expand her vocabulary as well as to get extra credit for the English class:

Nina: I think it [*Frankenstein*] was easy to understand. It was not difficult; I mean, there were some words, probably, but you could understand the book.

Luciene: And when there were some difficult words, what did you do?

Nina: Well, Ms. Martinez had the extra credit thing for the vocabulary, so when I would do the vocabulary I would know what they were talking about in the book (Nina, individual interview, 05/19/2014).

Like Juan, Nina and Ana, Natalia did not find the novel difficult to read. Natalia mentioned that she usually applied the context clues strategy to understand difficult texts; however, for the reading of *Frankenstein*, she just skipped difficult words because the teacher would not give them time to look for the meaning of their meaning during the silent reading in class. The young Latina also made a comment regarding the use of audio-recording during the silent reading of the novel. She said:

I liked that book. I thought it was boring at first but it started getting my attention. So I would prefer for the Ms. to let me read it by myself than have the tape read it to me cause the voice would bore me and get me sleepy (Natalia, individual interview, 05/07/2014).

While the audio-assisted activity was boring for Natalia, it was beneficial for Julie.

During our conversation about *Frankenstein*, Julie elaborated on her struggles with reading:

Luciene: And what types of material you don't like reading? Do you like novels, if someone explains to you?

Julie: Yeah, like the *Frankenstein*. The *Frankenstein*, if we hadn't stopped through every single thing, I would not have liked it. But since we did stop through every chapter and explained it, I like the fact that we did that. Cause then I would understand it.

Luciene: And what types of things you don't like reading?

Julie: I don't like reading, I don't know like those really long ones, boring ones.

Luciene: Have you ever read *Twilight* or *Harry Potter* and things like that?

Julie: No, cause I know I'm not gonna understand it (Julie, individual interview, 05/12/2014).

As the interview excerpt show, Julie really needed scaffolding for reading, especially for the reading of long texts. Although the instructional methods in Ms. Garcia might not have been ideal to support comprehension of the novels, Julie found that audio-assisted reading strategy and the teacher's initiative to orally summarize each chapter were useful. Julie added that, in order for her to better understand the *Frankenstein*, she would access a website called *Shmoop*, which she found out about on her own as she looked for book analyses online.

This section showed that students drew on different types of resources to understand the English canon, *Frankenstein*. Perhaps because the English classes were rigidly structured around the book reading and the completion of worksheets, some students, like Natalia, did not have time to apply reading strategies. Furthermore, the teachers' emphasis on *SparkNotes* seemed to have created a culture of "easy way out" where book summaries and analyses found online

gained the status of comprehension strategies in their own right. As for the audio-assisted approach used by the teachers in every class, it seemed to have been “boring” for some students like Natalia, but helpful for students like Julie who found it difficult to understand long texts. This is not to imply, however, that Julie and her classmates would not have benefitted from other types of scaffolding strategies that addressed individual learning styles.

Summary

The first half of this chapter focused on youth’s engagement with the reading of the literary canon, *Frankenstein*. Data analysis showed that the English classes were quite rigid and predictable, following the same English monolingual practices centered on the page-bound text and worksheets. The class structure seemed to limit students’ possibilities of self-authoring as students were rarely encouraged to draw on their funds of knowledge or personal experiences to make sense of the novel. Lacking opportunities to co-construct knowledge in interaction with the novel and their classmates, some students responded to the passive positioning with resistance. Both of the participating teachers, in interviews, referred to the reading of *Frankenstein* in class as a negative experience and they blamed the lack of material resources in the school and in the school community for it. Even though lack of material resources is in fact to be partly blamed, class observations and interviews with students revealed that students’ cultural and linguistic resources remained mostly untapped during instruction.

Despite the limitations regarding pedagogical approaches in the English classes, all participants in this study enjoyed *Frankenstein*, and most of them were able to make meaningful connections with it at the individual and societal levels. One particular class, taught by Ms. Martinez, seemed to have been the catalyst for those connections. In that class, students were encouraged to discuss the most relevant themes in novel: social identity, marginalization, and

loneliness. Perhaps because those themes refer to common issues faced by adolescents, the young Latino/as in this study were able to better connect with the reading by reflecting on who they were in relation to others. Nina and Nadia, for example, also took into account matters of power and privilege as they reflected about the times when they were judgmental or excluded others, and times when they experienced discrimination for not fitting into socially accepted patterns of beauty or behavior.

Thus the first part of this chapter demonstrated how the curriculum and the hidden curriculum of Southwest High reinforced the hierarchical power relations typically found in classrooms where teachers rigidly control classroom interactions. Power relations are minimized when teachers value students' resources or funds of knowledge, creating third spaces (Gutierrez et al., 1999) where diverse learners have more opportunities for (re)-positioning themselves. The second part of this chapter focuses on activities and discourses in the school that were meant to prepare students for the world of college. It starts by describing the research paper activity, which was considered very successful both by the teachers and all the participants. Unlike the reading of *Frankenstein*, the research paper offered many more opportunities for students to draw on their cultural and linguistic resources, thus authoring themselves as active learners and knowledge producers.

Envisioning the World of College

The first half of this chapter demonstrated how identity constructions were constrained and sometimes resisted because of the power relations embedded in the on-level English classes at Southwest High School. The focus then was the in-class reading of *Frankenstein* which none of the teachers considered successful. Ms. Garcia stated, "The reading of *Frankenstein* to me was a total disaster [...] I just couldn't stand having to read the book every day in class. I just don't

think that that works” (Ms. Garcia, individual interview, 06/20/2014). Now I turn to the description and analysis of practices meant to prepare students to navigate the academic literacies of college.

The Mini Research Paper

By the last week of February, 2014, Ms. Martinez and Ms. Garcia explained introduced to their students the guidelines for what they called a “mini research paper.” As explained in the beginning of this chapter, Ms. Martinez, with some guidance from the school coach, designed the on-level English IV curriculum. When I asked the teacher if it was her idea to have the students do a research paper, she replied:

It is in the curriculum but honestly a lot of people don’t do it because it’s a lot of work.

Teachers don’t wanna do it because it is a lot of work. It was a nightmare – the grading, and collecting the materials, and chasing the students. You saw every day. It was a nightmare. I felt sometimes that I was more stressed than the students about the work but I think it’s a necessity (Ms. Martinez, individual interview, 06/19/2014)

Even though it is within the TEKS (2008) guidelines that high school students do research papers since English I, teacher at SHS typically did it because, as Ms. Martinez explained, the research paper involved a great amount of work on the part of teachers and students. Despite of the amount of work, Ms. Martinez decided to assign the mini research paper and in the interview she explained her reasons for doing that:

I wanted them [students] to know what a paper looked like cause a lot times they’ve never seen one before. And I was trying to spare them, even just the smallest humiliation of going off to school [college] and turning in something that looked completely off. So

my goal was for them to mimic the style and see what an actual essay looks like, and then make theirs look like that (Ms. Martinez, individual interview, 06/19/2014).

The excerpt above demonstrates Ms. Martinez concern and a teacher and a college instructor as well. As she told me in informal conversations, many of her students at Southwest High School ended up graduating and starting their postsecondary studies at the community college campus where she taught English Composition. Some of these students then would become her college students and she wanted to make sure that they at least had a basic notion of what postsecondary writing entails.

The mini research paper resembled a college-level research paper in that it involved the steps embedded in the writing process such as researching about a topic, pre-writing, drafting and revising. According to the guidelines established by the English teachers, the research paper should be based on someone who the students deemed to have had a positively impact on society. The guidelines were very strict: using MLA style, students should write 7 pages using six references, including a book, an encyclopedia, and an article from EBSCO or Britannia. Many elements such as continuous scaffolding and feedback contributed to the success of the research paper; however, one aspect that stood out was that the classes in which students worked on the research paper were structured in a way that allowed for active participation and interactions. In those classes, the power relations seemed to have been minimized and students had much more freedom to draw on their linguistic and cultural resources not only to develop their own research paper but to help their classmates.

Drawing on Wenger (1999), students were part of a *community of practice* in which they engaged in collective learning activity with a purpose in mind. The research paper activity was also important for me as a researcher because I had more opportunities to fully immerse in the

fieldwork by freely interacting with students during class time and providing help whenever they needed. I started then to gain a more holistic view of who they were, what they did outside school, their general interests, and goals for the future.

Pre-task scaffolding.

The first steps to scaffold the writing of the mini research paper was to explain to students what plagiarism was and how to prevent it. The teachers had students watch a short *YouTube* video on that and had the students as well as students' parents sign a "Plagiarism Awareness Contract." The efforts to prevent plagiarism were consequence of a bad experience related to a small project that had been assigned after the reading of *Frankenstein*. Lacking explicit instruction on how to avoid plagiarism, many students simply copied and pasted information from the internet. In one interview, I asked Julie if she had plagiarized her *Frankenstein* paper and she replied, "No. *Pues*, I don't know. Cause I didn't know how to write a paper. So, I guess I did cause I didn't put any sources or anything" (Julie, individual interview, 11/07/2014). In the interview, Ms. Martinez acknowledged that the reason students committed plagiarism was that they had not been explicitly taught how to avoid it. The teacher added that this bad experience was a learning lesson for her and for Ms. Garcia, and therefore they decided to reinforce to their students that plagiarism is wrong in any circumstances. The teachers also spent time in their classes explaining to students how to quote and paraphrase. Students also learned how develop the entire paper using MLA style. They were given samples of reference pages and in-text citations, and were encouraged to access specific websites in case they needed further information on MLA style.

The classes that followed the initial explanations on the mini research paper were held in the school library so that students would have easier access to resources such as books and

computers which were often shared by two students. Before students started working on their project independently, they received instruction from the school librarian on how to access databases and efficiently search for articles. They were also taught, and took notes on, how to filter which websites were reliable and, finally, they also learned how to search for physical books and encyclopedias in the school library. After laying the groundwork, the teachers encouraged students to walk around the library or use the computers in search for the topic they would like to write about as well as the six sources to be used as references in the paper. Having chosen their topic and sources, the students started to regularly receive very detailed guideline sheets explaining how each part of the paper – introduction, body, and conclusion - should be developed. Before the actual writing of the paper, the students filled out a template for their research proposal. Then they started developing notecards containing important quotes, specifying author, year and page number, from their selected references for the paper; under the quote, there should be one or two sentences paraphrasing it. In doing so, students were learning how to avoid plagiarism.

(Re-) authoring selves through academic literacies.

After having researched their references and prepared their outlines, the students went on to type their mini research papers using the computers in the school library. As I walked around the library, I noticed that, in both Ms. Garcia's and Ms. Martinez's classes, the great majority of students was really invested in the completion of the research paper. Students were positioned and positioned themselves as independent and active learners. A few times I was able to observe how Julie, the "struggling reader", helped her classmates accomplish tasks. Julie's classmates actually approached her and requested help because they knew she paid attention to instructions and wrote them down in her notebook.

In one occasion, two of Julie's classmates requested help for the writing of the paper. Julie, then, stopped doing her own work and dedicated her time to explain her friends how to do in-text citations according to MLA style. As Julie proceeded with her explanation, she would, once in a while, ask her friends, "Do you get it?" to check that they really understood (Field notes, 03/25/2014). Activating prior-knowledge gained both from Ms. Garcia's class and from her experience as a journalist, Julie advised her friends to avoid the use of first person in the paper. Julie's effort to do well on her research paper was remarkable since its initial stages until the very end of the activity. The student, who chose to write about Steve Jobs, brought drafts of her paper for me to provide feedback on and each new draft showed improvement. It seems that the research paper activity and the instructional methods supporting it enabled new positionings as students were free to draw on their multiliterate identities as resources. Julie, for example, drew on identity as newspaper journalist to provide her friends some tutoring on academic writing.

Like Julie, Juan also used his multiliterate resources to help one of his classmates, Javier (pseudonym) throughout the process of developing the mini research paper. Juan and Javier were very good friends who would hang out together in the school cafeteria and in school the sports facilities. I interacted with Javier a few times and noticed that Spanish was his strongest language; however, I was not sure if he was classified as ELL. In the classes held in the library, Juan and Javier worked as a team conducting research on their selected topics, creating outlines and informational notecards, as well as assisting each other in the peer-reviewing process. All the interactions among the students were in Spanish with Juan, just like Julie, playing the role of tutor. Juan's role as Javier's tutor stood out in interactions mediated by technology where the students were using the EBSCO database. As Javier had missed the class in which the librarian

explained the use of databases, Juan who had learned really well how navigate databases, assisted his friend in translating search words from Spanish to English and conducting Boolean search.

Natalia joined Juan and Javier during the process of peer-reviewing. Observing Natalia working with a small group of friends was revealing because the student seemed to be more engaged than in the classes prior to the research paper. But what appeared to be lack of engagement during those classes had more to do with Natalia's personality: she described herself as very shy around people she does not know too well. Besides, in our interview, Natalie said that she found many of the students in her school immature. Around Juan, Natalia felt comfortable to be herself as the two of them have been longtime friends. In their small peer-review group which included Javier, Spanish was spoken almost the entire time. The students worked on the research paper and, at the same time, had a good time with Juan's funny personality.

Cecilia, Nadia, Ana, and Nina usually sat close to each other in all English classes. When the classes were held in the library, they worked as a team peer-reviewing each other's research papers. The young Latinas asked me to peer-review their work. When Ana asked me to peer-review her paper on Martin Luther King, she told me that she looked through many different sources because she wanted her paper to be unique by focusing on facts that are not commonly known about the Civil Rights icon. Ana added that she was glad Ms. Martinez had assigned the research paper because it would prepare them for college writing. She said, "I want to learn how to write a research paper because I don't want to look dumb in college" (Field notes, 03/26/2014). When writing the introduction for her paper, Ana spent time developing a good

“hook”. She had learned in her previous AP English classes that “hooks” had to be one or two short, catchy sentences.

After the writing of the completion of the research paper, all the students were required to deliver an academic presentation using power points. The students received explicit instruction on the basic of how to prepare a power point presentation and also on what to wear or not to wear in order to look professional. The students continued to use the computers in the library and support each other while developing their power points. They would often ask each other’s suggestions on the design of their slides. Nadia, for example, wrote her research paper on Princess Diana’s life and, while working on her presentation, she asked Cecilia’s suggestion on how to make her power points look “princessy” so as to convey the “sweetness of Lady Diana” (Field notes, 05/09/2014). Cecilia then suggested the use of Lucida handwriting for font and the addition of some details pink. For her own presentation, Cecilia asked my assistance on how to create a hyperlink to a *YouTube* video on the life on Cesar Chavez. In the interview, when asked about why she had chosen to do her research paper on Cesar Chavez, Cecilia told me about her personal connection with the topic. She said, “I guess because he was Mexican American and I am Mexican American. And they needed their rights as well because they were treated like nothing and they didn’t give them money and stuff and I thought that was wrong” (Cecilia, individual interview, 05/20/2014). Cecilia then had chosen a topic that reflected her cultural identity and did a very good job on that. Her power point presentation was very organized as she combined concise information in bullet points, images, and a short video. The presentations was also properly divided containing an introductory, development and conclusion sections followed by a slide on the works cited, written in MLA style.

The entire process of developing the research paper and delivering an academic presentation was considered, by both teachers and students, a success. Various factors seemed to have contributed to success of the research paper as opposed to the reading of *Frankenstein* followed by its small project. The literacies around the novel, its reading during the English classes and small project, seemed to have been hindered by factors such as little scaffolding and the rigid class structure that did not draw on students' multiple literacies and identities as resources. On the other hand, the research paper and professional presentation that followed it, besides being very well scaffolded, also heavily relied on students' funds of knowledge, thus enabling new positionings. Table 5.1 shows the types of resources utilized in support for the reading of the *Frankenstein* novel as compared to the development of the research paper:

Table 5.1

Activities and Resources

	<i>Frankenstein</i> novel	Research paper
Class structure	Teacher-centered; little student-student interaction; little scaffolding.	Free interactions among students sometimes mediated by digital technology; Strong scaffolding in the beginning and as needed throughout tasks.
Resources	<i>Frankenstein</i> novel and worksheets	1-Material: computers (sometimes shared by students), books, guideline worksheets. 2- Non-material: Students themselves drawing on their multiliterate identities, i.e.: Newspaper journalist; bilinguals; technology experts.
Positionings	Strugglers; Passive/uninterested learners; disruptive/resistant students	Tutors for classmates; peer-reviewers; writers; creative authors; independent and active learners; pre-college students.

As table 5.1 shows, the research paper activity was also constrained by lack of material resources leading students to, at times, share one computer. Nevertheless, the flexible class structure allowed students to communicate and support one another by drawing on their own strengths, or resources. Students authored themselves as “tutors”, “computer experts”, “active learners and so on. Most importantly, participants in this study authored themselves as “pre-college students” because they felt that, as reported in the interviews, the research paper activity, including the academic presentations with power points, had prepared them for college. Within the figured worlds theory, students’ engagement with the research paper activity can be interpreted as “serious play” in which aspired identities potentially emerge through practices that mimic a cultural world (Urrieta, 2007). The research paper then was a good example of how multiliterate identities “thickened” as students transferred their out-of-school practices to the space of school.

Teachers’ role in supporting students’ academic aspirations.

The previous section showed that Ms. Garcia and Ms. Martinez demonstrated their concern about equipping students with the tools they needed to navigate college-level literacies. Even though this knowledge is fundamental for students to feel confident in pursuing higher education, nurturing advice and encouragement from teachers are also important. While chapter four explored parental support through *consejos* (nurturing advice), this section of chapter five looks at how daily interactions with teachers turned (or not) into sources of support for students academic aspirations. Support and lack of support were sometimes easily identified during class observations; other times, they remained part of the hidden curriculum of the English classes.

As the days to students’ graduation at Southwest High School approached, conversations about college intensified both in and outside the classrooms. Natalia, for example, told me she

felt anxious about it but excited at the same time. By May 2014, the student had already attended the Orientation Day at Borderland University. Nadia and Ana were very organized as well. By the beginning on June, 2014, they had already registered for their classes at CC. Both of the students were very excited about it and shared the news in Ms. Martinez's class. Ms. Martinez was always very encouraging about college and showed that by explicitly talking about the topic with her students. The teacher would talk about her personal experiences going to college, types of professions students could choose from, and provided advice when students requested. Her classroom decoration also supported a college-going culture with university pennants on the walls.

Ms. Martinez's caring attitude not only was evident in the way she motivated her students to pursue a college degree, but it was also clear when the teacher spent class time talking about topics that mattered to her students. Juan, for example, told Ms. Martinez that he was going for a job interview at Chick-Fil-A because he was tired of working at McDonald's. The teacher took that opportunity to explain to him and the entire class what to wear, how to behave, and what to say during a job interview. After that class, I told Ms. Martinez that it was nice to see how she cared about her students. She replied, "They don't know these things. Nobody tells them" (Field notes, 05/19/2014). Ms. Martinez was referring to the conversations she had had with Juan about job interviews. The teacher made knowledge explicit to students because she seemed to be aware that, for many of them, school was the main source of information on and preparation for jobs, careers, college, among other aspects of social life.

Another remarkable example of Ms. Martinez's caring attitude occurred when one student told her that he had been accepted into a university in Indiana. The teacher complimented him with excitement and shared the news with the entire class. Then she got a map of the U.S.

and showed to the class where Indiana was located and told the students that her husband had graduated from Notre Dame University, in Indiana. When Ms. Martinez mentioned that her husband had majored in accounting, Ana and two other students started to ask many questions related to accounting. Ms. Martinez then decided that she would invite her husband for a Q & A with her students so that they could have a clearer idea if accounting would be a major they would like to pursue.

The examples above, among others I witnessed, demonstrate that Ms. Martinez's English class was a space where students' academic aspirations were nurtured through different types of discourses such as conversations, attitudes, and visual aids (material artifacts). In informal conversations, the teacher told me that she had high expectations towards her students. In the same way, Ms. Garcia also told me that her expectations were high; however, her interactions with students were very different from what I observed in Ms. Martinez's class. In Ms. Garcia class, there rarely was room for conversations about any topic except for the class subject itself. It seemed that class management was also an issue for the teacher and perhaps this problem related to the way she addressed students. Ms. Garcia tone was very directive, limiting herself to telling students what to do. After giving instructions on what and how to do a task, the teacher would sit at her desk to grade assignments or use the computer. Sometimes students, especially two ELLs, approached her to request assistance and she helped them either in English or Spanish. Many students, however, would be talking rather than doing their assignments. A few students were often joking and laughing, or walking around the classroom, which led Ms. Garcia to assign seats so that those "disruptive/troubled" students would be separated.

In one of Ms. Garcia's class, the students were supposed to present a visual timeline of their lives. They had to include pictures and main events from their childhood, adolescence, and

also illustrations that reflected their future plans or dreams. Each picture should be accompanied by two or three explanatory sentences. One day before the presentation, Julie asked if I could help her with the task by revising her sentences. In reality, the student had written entire paragraphs for each of the pictures reflecting the main events in her life trajectory. Julie and I worked together in her Journalism classroom where she worked for the school newspaper and also did all her homework. While I revised the sentences, Julie pointed to her family pictures on the timeline and talked about her childhood memories, her present time, goals and hopes for her future. The student seemed happy about presenting her timeline; however, she got disappointed: on the day of the presentation, the teacher kept sitting at her desk, using the computer, not facing the students. In spite of that, most students presented their work, including one ELL who relied on translanguaging during the presentation and also had the assistance of two classmates who volunteered to help. The other ELL in that class said he would not present because he did not feel confident.

As for Julie, when it was her turn to present, she went up to the front of the classroom but soon realized that neither Ms. Garcia nor her classmates were paying attention to her. The student then looked at me and said, “Nobody is paying attention. I am not gonna present” (Field notes, 05/29/2014). Julie removed her timeline activity from the wall where it was stuck and went back to her desk without Ms. Garcia even noticing it. Unfortunately, events as the one just described may signal to students that their identities and future aspirations do not matter in the space of school.

College Planning

Even though some practices in the school were not supportive of students’ identities and future aspirations, as seen in the previous section, some students, including the participants in

this study seemed determined to pursue higher education. During the time students were invested in developing the research paper, conversations about college became more frequent also gaining a more thoughtful tone. Because recruitment for this study started around that time, many students would ask me college-related questions. Most of those students were considering starting their postsecondary studies at the community college so as to save money; however, they were concerned about losing credits in the process of transferring to a four-year institution. I learned from some of the students that BU's recruitment staff had been to the school in the beginning of the academic year and had explained about application requirements as well as financial aid. Recruiters from private universities also went to the school to deliver presentations about their institutions during the English classes. Among these private institutions were DeVry University and Johnson & Wales University-Denver. On the other hand, students complained about not having had the opportunity to talk to staff from CC. Addressing their complaint, I asked permission from the school principal and from the English teachers to invite a recruiter from CC to the school. The teachers liked the idea and permission was granted for me to contact CC staff.

The CC recruiter told me that he was surprised when he got my email inviting him to give a talk at Southwest High School. He said he had contacted several staff members from the school asking their permission to deliver his presentation but he never heard back from anyone. Ms. Martinez, who was around us and heard the recruiter's comment, added that she did not like the idea of having these "weird private universities", as she put it, coming to the school to recruit students. She said that she wondered what Southwest High School was gaining from allowing recruiters from these universities to come into classes. The teacher thanked the CC recruiter for coming and he started his presentation which covered important information that first generation

college students are not usually aware of, particularly in relation to transferring credits from the community college to a four-year university.

By the end of the presentation several students approached the recruiter to ask further questions. Julie, who seemed very determined to go to college but had financial concerns, also approached the recruiter to inquire about career fields at CC. Julie seemed completely lost about career choices. She told the recruiter that she wanted to get a B.A. and a Master's degree in business so as to work as a secretary for a government agency like her friend did. I tried to help Julie define her professional goals by looking at the CC brochure with her and trying to have her figure out what she was actually interested in studying. Nadia, Ana, Cecilia, and Juan, on that same day, told me that they had made a decision to start their postsecondary studies at CC and later transfer to BU. Natalia decided to go to BU while Nina remained in doubt for a while but later opted for BU. Nina relied on two main sources of financial support to attend BU: her parents and a scholarship that was awarded to her for being among the top ten percent graduating seniors. Ana also graduated among the top ten percent, and therefore received a scholarship as well; however, the student could not rely on her family for financial assistance. Thus, participants' decisions on which postsecondary institution to attend were mainly guided by financial reasons. According to the CC recruiter, during his recruitment presentations in high school in the region, it was common for students to initially say that they planned on attending out of state institutions; nonetheless, very few students would actually do that and most students ended up matriculating at CC.

Summary

This chapter examined students' literacies and identities in the figured world of school, a context where uneven power relations may be either minimized or maximized according to how

curriculum is designed and implemented. During my data collection at Southwest High School, two activities stood out as examples of how power relations impacted the production of identities in the senior-level English classes: the reading of the literary canon *Frankenstein*; and the development of the mini research paper. The first activity constrained students' possibilities of authoring themselves as active, multiliterate learners, thus leading to different forms of resistance. The second activity, the research paper, required students' active engagement, which seemed to have contributed to minimize relations of power as students had plenty of opportunities to author themselves as interested learners by drawing on their repertoire of practices.

A study conducted by Barton et al. (2013) support the findings of this chapter. Using the figured worlds theory, the researchers traced two middle school girls' identity constructions as scientists across spaces and time. One of the participants was very interested in science, enjoyed inquiry and participated in many scientific activities in and out of her classroom. The student different interests like writing poetry and hip hop music. Findings showed that, despite her vast repertoire of practices and high interest in science in the beginning of middle school, the student became increasingly disengaged from her science classes over the years as the classes became very much centered on lectures and worksheets. Resisting the way science was done in upper middle school, the young girl would show "disruptive" behavior by drawing or talking to classmates throughout her science class.

In contrast, the other young girl participating in the study, who at first reported not being very interested in science, increasingly developed her scientific identity over the middle school years. As her classes and after-school program offered many opportunities for creative engagement with science, the student's scientific identity thickened as she accumulated cultural

capital or resources. Drawing on her interest for music and choreography skills, the student, with the help of a few classmates, was able to produce a video meant to raise awareness about energy efficiency. The production of the video, which was presented as part of her science class assignment, also led to the production of new identities/positionings – from “struggling” and “disengaged” student to “the student that teachers wanted to clone” (Barton et al., 2013, p. 63).

The study described above shows how identities become stronger as social actors have opportunities to transfer cultural resources across contexts and over time. Even though lack of material resources is a problem faced by many teachers in U.S. public school, particularly the ones serving minoritized communities (Kena et al., 2015; .S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, 2014), it is still possible to promote meaningful learning experiences by capitalizing on students’ interests and strengths (Moje, 2004, 2007; Enright, 2011). By placing students’ hybrid literacies and identities at the center of the learning activity, teachers are promoting third spaces (Gutierrez et al. 1999). In those spaces, power relations tend to be minimized as diverse ways of knowing are viewed as resources that contribute to expanding existing knowledge. In this chapter, the mini research paper, despite the lack of material resources, seemed to have been successful because third spaces were supported. Engagement with the research paper literacies gave students the opportunity to (re)-author themselves, which in turn, might have helped to foster their motivations and confidence to envision themselves in the figured world of college.

Chapter 6: The Figured World of College

Introduction

The previous chapter focused on participants' identity constructions in the space of senior English classes at Southwest High Schools. In that context, identities and future aspirations seemed to be shaped by literacy practices, the power relations embedded in them, as well as by material and symbolic artifacts that both produced and were the products of daily interactions among students and teachers. The chapter showed that some practices and discourses in the school context enabled the production of identities, while others appeared to constrain students' possibilities of self-making and were not conducive to the development of a college-going culture.

In this chapter, I examine participants' identity constructions as they started their postsecondary studies at the Community College and Borderland University. Similarly to the previous chapter, the two higher education institutions presented here were seen as figured worlds structured around a set of sociocultural practices - rules, conventions, codes, and expectations, that students need to be aware of and negotiate in order to persist and succeed. Gee's theory of Discourses (with capital D) can be very useful to shed light on identities (re)constructions within the cultural world of higher education. Gee (2012) argues that:

A Discourse with a capital D is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading *coupled* with distinctive way of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities" (p.152).

Discourses then are social identities or “identity kits” which individuals draw on in order to engage in activities shared by a social group or discourse community (Gee, 2012). Legitimate membership in a given discourse community requires appropriation of particular ways of talking, thinking, reading, writing, dressing, for instance. Gee (2012) goes on to distinguish primary discourses from secondary discourses. While primary discourses are acquired early in life mostly through interactions with family, secondary discourses are acquired through participation in more formally organized institutions such as schools and workplace. It is worth noting that individuals participate in many discourse communities concomitantly, therefore develop a repertoire of social identities which can never be completely separated. Rather, individuals negotiate identities according to the situated practices shared by a group. These negotiations can be difficult, especially if participation in a new discourse community requires embodiment of practices/identities that greatly differ from one’s cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In this regard, even when one is seeking participation in a given community, he or she may resist, contest, or oppose certain collective practices.

In this chapter, both postsecondary education institutions, CC and BU, were examined as large cultural communities where “ways of being a college student”, or more specifically “a good college student”, were tied to academic practices that cut across disciplines such as the ability to work independently and in groups, and manage time wisely. Within the larger community of college student, there are sub-groups where successful membership requires the acquisition of more particular “ways of being in the world” or “identity kits,” so as to be recognized as “certain kinds of people” (Gee, 2012). The various disciplinary fields that comprise higher education, i.e., history, math, science, and so on, are examples of discourse communities which value specific ways of doing things (social identities). Generally, one of the

goals of English Composition (EC) courses is to support students' successful participation in different discourse communities by raising awareness of disciplinary literacies, meaning the "specialized discourses" used in different disciplines (Batholomae, 1985; Zamel, 1998).

The *Writing Across the Curriculum* (WAC) movement in the U.S. and the *Academic Literacies* movement in the U.K. have greatly contributed to an understanding of the complexities surrounding disciplinary literacies which, scholars say, are not clear cut. Even though there are features that distinguish writing across disciplines, genres may vary within disciplinary fields, according to specific tasks and professors' expectations (Lea & Street, 2006; Lea, 2008; Russell, Lea et al., 2009). Thus, both the longstanding WAC movement and the newer Academic Literacies approach share the similar view of genre as contextual, product of interactions among students, texts, and professors. The notion of genre as social practice, supported by both movements, challenges the notion of "poor writing" as it sheds light on issues of power and identity in the production of texts (Lea & Street, 2006; Lea, 2008; Russell et al., 2009).

With the notions of academic literacies as social practices in mind, this chapter examines how participants in this study both shaped and were shaped by the figured worlds of CC and BU. Throughout the chapter, I use the terms *academic discourses* (Batholomae, 1985; Gee, 2012; Zamel, 1998) and *academic literacies* (Lea & Street, 2006; Lea, 2008; Russell, Lea, Parker, Street, & Donahue, 2009) interchangeably to refer to: (a) the literacy practices of specific disciplines (disciplinary literacies); and (b) the more general academic practices that are typically tied to the identity of successful college student. Those academic practices, also known as "academic behaviors" in the college readiness literature, include communication with professors and peers, time management and study strategies ("study skills"). I use the term *disciplinary*

literacy, as previously mentioned, in reference to the literacy practices within disciplines. Having clarified the use of key terms, this chapter seeks to answer the following questions: How are participants' identities shaped through engagement with academic discourses? How do students make sense of their literacies and identity development at the end of their first semester in college?

This chapter is organized as follows: first, the chapter explores students' transitions to college highlighting general academic challenges identified by students' themselves. These challenges relate to college literacy practices typically needed for succeeding across disciplines; therefore, the literature on college readiness will be helpful in this discussion (Conley, 2007, 2010; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Barnes & Slate, 2013; Barnes, Slate, Rojas-LeBouef, 2010; Chandler, Slate, Moore & Barnes, 2014). After discussing these academic challenges, this chapter will look at students' experiences with reading and writing in their introductory college courses. Finally, the chapter explores how students' made sense of their academic trajectories, including college preparedness, and identity development across spaces – high school and college – and time.

The Postsecondary Education Contexts

The Community College: Heritage Campus.

The Community College was where most of the Latino/a students in this borderland region started their postsecondary education (CC 2012-2013 Academic Year Fact Book, 2013). Four participants, Ana, Nadia, Juan, and Cecilia, reported having opted for the Community College because of the lower tuition fees as compared to BU. All of these four participants were taking their first-semester college classes on the Heritage campus (pseudonym) which is the CC

campus located right across Southwest High School. Perhaps because of the proximity between the high school and the Heritage community college campus, some students thought of the latter as an extension of the former. During my data collection at Southwest High, I often heard students talking about their intentions to pursue their postsecondary studies in a “real university,” rather than at the Community College, Heritage campus, where most of their high school peers were likely to attend.

The Community College had a total of five campuses. Compared to the main campus, the Heritage campus was very small. There were only three buildings: the Main building, the classroom building, and a small library where the computer labs were located. In the interview that I conducted with Mr. Delgado, Cecilia’s EC instructor, the library hours was cited as a challenge faced by students on Heritage campus. According to Mr. Delgado, CC served a large number of low income students who had to balance their time between school and work.

I just wish we had hours like the Borderland University does. I mean we do have evening classes here but the lab I think closes kind of early even for those classes and the library here as well isn’t open on weekends. So yeah, I wish we would do more as far as that goes especially because students a lot of times just come in the evening because they work during the day or they don’t have access at home, so weekends might be the only time that they can actually work on their papers. As I mentioned, this is one of the weaknesses here (Mr. Delgado, Interview, 12/12/2014).

In the excerpt above Mr. Delgado brought up one of the issues Southwest High School teachers also faced which was the scarcity of resources, particularly technology resources, in the community. Perhaps because of this challenge, the Community College classes seemed to rely

much less on technology as compared to BU classes. Ms. Martinez, the Southwest High School teacher who also taught English Composition at CC, for example, did not integrate any web-based activities in her curriculum except for the use of online databases for the completion of a research paper.

In comparison to the Borderland University, the Heritage campus was a much smaller physical and cultural world and this seemed to be an advantage for students transitioning to college, particularly the ones from Southwest High. As we will see throughout the chapter, participants in this study took classes together which made it easier for them to figure out the world of college and overcome difficulties during their first semester of college.

Borderland University.

Borderland University in the southwest border region was the main choice for the local high school graduates who wished to start their postsecondary studies at a university rather than a community college. During the time of my data collection at SHS, I witnessed many interactions among senior-level students regarding what universities they wanted to attend. Even though some students were interested in attending universities such as UT Dallas and UT Houston, they eventually opted for BU mainly because of the costs of going out of town. Three of the participants started their postsecondary studies at BU: Natalia, Nina, and Julie. Even though Nina and Julie had considered starting higher education at CC, they finally decided for the BU because, in doing so, they felt they would not have to deal with transfer issues in the future.

Starting higher education at BU was, at the same time, exciting and challenging for participants as this physical and cultural world was much bigger and complex in comparison to CC. The fact that the participants attending BU were not taking any classes together added to the

challenge of navigating the university. As one can imagine, BU students had more resources to rely on, including a large library where math and writing tutoring services were provided. Even though CC also provided math and writing tutoring, BU offered a better schedule which included weekends. The library had a good number of PC's and Mac computer and many colleges within the university also had computer labs available for the students. Availability of computers is important at BU because many of its classes heavily rely on technology -- practically all instructors make use of the Blackboard system and some instructors have students use the web for other purposes such as researching and blogging. In the interview with Ms. Carlson, Julie's EC instructor, she shared how she integrated technology into her classes:

[...] Everything is on Blackboard. We build websites. They have to do that. They have to be acclimated not only to BB but on how to build their own website. They have to know how to make their own documentaries. They learn how to do that, so they need to. It is a very technology -based class. Everything that goes into that class, they have to be on a computer to do [...] They have to turn it in online; they have to get the instructions online; they read online. Everything that they have access to is literally online except for one of the books. And so it is definitely technology-based. I grade online. They get the feedback online. Everything is online. (Interview, Ms. Carlson, 01/27/2015).

In the interview, Ms. Carlson went on to say that integration of technology was a requirement in the EC curriculum. Regarding the challenges of teaching at BU, the Ms. Carlson highlighted common issues faced by first-year college students, “[...] Procrastination, when they don't wanna do the work but they wanna say they are in college, and so the time management, that kind of thing” (Ms. Carlson, 01/27/2015). Time management among students also emerged

as a problem identified during my interview with Ms. Arnold, Natalia's EC instructor; however, the instructor also emphasized the wide range in academic preparedness among her students. She said:

I am amazed from both of my classes to where I have - the spectrum is so wide between college preparedness. I have students that, from scale from 1 to 100, I have students who are at 99 and then I have students who are down to 10. And it is not their fault. I don't blame them. I blame the structure of the way BU's admission is set up. They don't realize that a student that is at a 10 in writing is probably is at a 100 in engineering or in science, but yet they just automatically lump them in the same category (Ms. Arnold, Interview, 12/09/2014).

Academic preparedness, as the excerpt shows, is identified as a challenge by Natalia's instructor, Ms. Carlson. With BU's undergraduate acceptance rate at 100% (Grove, 2015), the level of academic preparedness of its students may drastically vary. Whereas some students at BU attended well-funded public and private K-12 schools, others attended underfunded schools where material resources are scarce and human resources are often less qualified (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Barnes, Slate, Rojas-LeBouef, 2010; Chandler, Slate, Moore & Barnes, 2014; Hochschild, 2003). In the next section, I further discuss the notion of academic preparedness in contrast with the notion of college readiness.

Students' Transitions to College

In the previous section, the issue of academic preparedness emerged as a challenge for BU's English Composition instructor, Ms. Carlson. Some authors use the terms academic

preparedness and college readiness interchangeably, while others make distinctions between them. I consider these distinctions important, therefore I will discuss them later on in this section.

Conley (2007) points out that, currently, there are three main ways to determine college readiness and those are: course titles, grade-point averages, and tests. In this study, all participants were considered “college-ready” in terms of reading and writing because their TAKS scores were sufficient for their placement in college-level classes. A few of the students, however, were placed in developmental math courses. Table 6.1 shows students’ first college classes:

Table 6.1

First Semester of College Classes

Community College Classes	
Ana and Nadia	EC; Master Academic Excellence; History; Math
Juan	EC; Master Academic Excellence; History; Developmental Math
Cecilia	EC (dropped); Master Academic Excellence; History (dropped); Developmental Math; Psychology.
Borderland University Classes	
Julie	EC; University; Developmental Math; Psychology (failed)
Natalia	EC; Geology; Business; Math for Social Sciences; History
Nina	History; University; History; Pre-Calculus; Psychology

As the table shows, Cecilia, Juan, and Julie were not considered “college-ready” in the discipline of math because their ACCUPLACER test scores were lower than what was required for placement in college-level math. At Southwest High School, senior-level students were

required to take the ACCUPLACER, a Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessment tool that covers the areas of reading, writing, and math skills. During the time of this study, TAKS scores were also considered an indicator of college readiness; nonetheless, the ACCUPLACER was still a requirement to determine students' placement in college-level math and English courses. Course titles such as Advanced Placement and Dual Credit could be used as indicators of college readiness and also for exemption from TSI assessment so long as the students passed a final exam. Only three participants in this study were in AP classes during their secondary education: Cecilia, Ana and Nina. Cecilia took AP U.S. History. Ana took AP classes in U.S. history, World History, Math, and English III. Nina took AP English III but decided to switch to on-level English classes in her senior year with the intention of graduating with a higher GPA. Even though Cecilia, Ana, and Nina took AP classes during high school, they did not get college credits because they did not take the required exam for that. Both Ana and Nina graduated in the top 10% from high school. Despite having graduated in the top 10%, Ana and Nina as well as all other participants were required to take the TSI test (ACCULACER) which was the basis for deciding if they were "college-ready."

Scholars have argued that determining college readiness on the basis of GPAs or test scores is very limiting. Barnes and Slate (2013) are particularly critical of the "one-size-fits-all college readiness agenda" (p.1) which relies simply on standardized test scores to determine whether students are prepared for college or not. Barnes, Slate and Rojas-Lebouef (2010) claim that the term *academic preparedness* better "represents what is being measured under the rubric of college readiness (p. 1). The authors go on to explain that students' performance in standardized tests may be considered an indicator of their level of academic preparation;

nevertheless, academic preparedness is just one aspect under the broader umbrella of college readiness which, besides cognitive factors, also includes non-cognitive aspects.

Also finding current definitions of college readiness too narrow, Conley (2007; 2010) proposes a model of college readiness that encompasses both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects identified as inherent for college access and success. The four interrelated dimensions comprising Conley's (2007; 2010) model are: *key cognitive strategies* and *content knowledge* (cognitive dimensions); and *academic behaviors* and *contextual skills and awareness* (non-cognitive dimensions). *Key cognitive strategies* refer to habits of thinking that enable students to analyze and interpret information from college-level coursework. Critical thinking and problem solving skills are examples of key cognitive strategies that help students to succeed across content areas. *Key content knowledge* pertains to foundational knowledge of the core academic subjects whereas *academic behaviors* involve self-monitoring and study skills such as time management, preparing for exams, taking notes during classes, and establishing communication with professors, peers, and academic advisors. Finally, *contextual skills and awareness* relates to knowledge of how the postsecondary system works (i.e.: financial aid and admissions) as well as the social skills to navigate the system.

Even though Conley's (2007; 2010) model sheds light on some of the key aspects of college readiness, it has been criticized for not taking into account structural factors that influences high school graduates' chances to enter higher education and obtain a college degree. Researchers have pointed out that educational access and academic preparation in U.S. public schools are unequal and racialized. Released by the U.S. Department of Education, a report titled *The condition of education 2015* (Kena et al., 2015) revealed that in the 2012-13 academic year, Black and Hispanic students had the highest percentages of attendance at high-poverty

public schools which are defined as schools where over 75 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. In the 2012-13 academic year, 45 percent of Black students and 45 percent of Hispanic students attended high-poverty public schools, while only 8 percent of White students were matriculated at these schools (Kena et al., 2015). According to another report released by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2014), Black and Latino/a students are significantly more likely to have teachers with less experience and who are underpaid in comparison to their peers in other schools. Furthermore, White high school students have more access to advanced courses that help students prepare for college (i.e., Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, calculus). While 71 percent of White students have access to these courses, only 57 percent of Black students and 67 percent of Latino/a students are offered advanced courses during high school. Parents' educational level also contributes to the reproduction of inequalities. Research shows that the parents of underrepresented students are less likely to hold a college degree, and therefore have less access to the social and cultural capital needed to support their children in the process of selecting a postsecondary institution as well as entering and navigating higher education (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Cabrera et al., 2006; Chandler et al. 2014; Dumais & Ward, 2009; Fann, Jarsky & McDonough, 2009; Kena et al., 2015). In sum, the inequalities discussed here play an important role in the academic preparedness and, in a broader sense, the college readiness of minoritized students.

Having provided some background to understand the concepts of academic preparedness and college readiness, I now present and discuss findings related general academic challenges identified by students' themselves. These challenges are associated to college literacy practices typically needed for succeeding across disciplines.

“Figuring Out” the Academic Literacies of College

Even though the term academic literacies encompasses disciplinary literacies, in this section I use it to present and discuss challenges that participants faced in acquiring academic practices that cut across disciplines. Often referred to as “academic behaviors” or “study skills” (Conley, 2007; 2010; Roderick et al., 2009), the academic literacies discussed here involve time management, study strategies, notetaking, and communication with faculty and peers.

Communication with professors, peers, and staff.

Communication with faculty and peers can be intimidating for freshmen considering that these students usually come straight from high school, a context regulated by very different sets of rules and conventions as compared to college. The participants in this study, both at BU and CC, found it difficult to communicate with faculty and peers, particularly in the beginning of their first semester in college. This difficulty sometimes led to feelings of loneliness, which happened to Natalia throughout her entire first semester in college; other times, lack of communication with professors and peers interfered with learning. In the following excerpt, CC students describe communication issues stemming from their lack of identification with the context of higher education:

Ana: My teacher gives me points if I go up on the board and do the problem.

Cecilia: I wouldn't [chuckles]

Luciene: Do you feel shy?

Cecilia: uh-hum cause I don't know anybody in my classes.

Luciene: So when you told me that you don't feel like yourself, what do you mean?

Ana: Like trying to adapt and cope [everyone chuckles].

Cecilia: I am just like not me – like I am not loud. I am not talking to a lot of people.

I am just quiet.

Ana: You are not socializing.

Cecilia: No, I am just sitting there, just taking notes or just like whatever.

Ana: Like we don't fit in or something. I feel like that.

Cecilia: I feel like I don't fit in either.

Luciene: Does anyone have this same impression?

Nadia: You have to act more mature. Like way more mature cause there is like people of all ages.

Luciene: And you Juan? Do you feel yourself?

Juan: I used to be loud as hell in class.

Ana: You can't even laugh anymore.

Juan: I can't. If you laugh, everybody's is like "What the hell is wrong with this guy?" [Everyone chuckles]. (Focus group at CC, 09/19/2014).

In the interaction above, Cecilia and Juan expressed frustration for not being able to be themselves by being "loud" and "laughing" in the same way they used to behave in high school. Ana talked about "not fitting in" and Nadia complemented their comment by noting that there was a need to behave in a "more mature" way because there were people of all ages in their college classes. The excerpt above indicates that the students at CC were becoming aware of the discourses – acts, values, and attitudes – that characterize postsecondary institutions (Gee, 2012). In order to "fit in" and succeed into this new cultural world, participants would have to develop new social identities, very different from their "high-school identities" which were shaped by other types of practices and norms.

Like the students at CC, participants attending BU also shared their frustrations stemming from lack of communication within their classrooms:

Nina: She [the history instructor] gave us a list in the syllabus. You know how the syllabus tells you everything you are gonna do throughout the year? And when I go to syllabus there is nothing that she had said about all these essays and some “IDs”. I don’t know what those are. It is like I have no idea what we are supposed to be doing.

Luciene: And do you talk to other people? Are they lost also?

Nina: I don’t know. I don’t talk to anybody [...] I think I am just intimidated to go to the teachers. I think they expect me to know exactly what to do so I feel even weirder just asking the question “What am I supposed to be doing for your class?” I know it is worse cause I end up losing. [...] Like in high school I would just ask “Can you tell me what we are supposed to do?” And here even if they ask “is everything clear?” And I say “Yes.” And I am like doubting everything she [her history instructor] just said.

Natalia: That’s how I am in my math class [...] Like everybody just says “yes.” We are like yeah, sure. After a while I understand what he is talking about. It is cause it is true like when they have an accent it is hard to understand what they are saying.

Luciene: And it is very hard?

Natalia: it is not that hard but yeah, he has an accent so it is like sometimes “What is he saying?” And then he tells us “Oh, if you don’t understand, just tell me.”

But like people don't tell him anything. They are just like oh, just keep going.

Like today, I did not understand anything today (Focus Group at BU, 09/19/2014)

The excerpt above, Nina and Natalia shared narratives in which their learning processes in different classes were hindered by their inability to interact with instructors and peers. Natalia had difficulty in understanding math because of her instructor's accent and felt uncomfortable to ask for clarification in class, especially because it was very large class taught in an auditorium. The fact that Natalia was very shy and found it difficult to make new friends, as she explained to me, perhaps made it even more difficult for her to navigate her classes, including the smaller size classes. As for Nina, the excerpt showed her frustration in her history class which had approximately 25-30 students. She did not understand exactly what the class requirements were because, according to her, neither the class syllabus nor the instructor presented clear guidelines.

During the focus group interview, Nina, like Natalia, also complained about not learning much in her math class and being embarrassed to ask questions, "[...] In my Pre-calculus class, I am pretty much teaching myself," she said. To catch with her math class, the student watched YouTube videos that taught the step-by-step of specific problems. Nina also told me that she had visited the BU's math tutoring center as suggested by her math instructor; however, she ended up leaving without actually being tutored. In our second individual interview, Nina told me:

I went in [the math tutoring center] and we had to sign in so I just looked at everyone and I am like never mind. I don't wanna go. I just felt like they would think that I am not smart. So I left because I was embarrassed. (Nina, individual interview, 10/31/2014).

The excerpt above shows Nina's concern about "not looking smart" when interacting with the tutor. Perhaps this is an example of how individuals struggle with emerging identities.

Wortham (2004) explains that identities are constructed based on circulating identification models within a given context. Examples of circulating models of identity in educational contexts are “smart”, “struggling”, and “disruptive” learner. The more one is positioned as a certain type of person within one context or across contexts, the more their identities thicken (Holland and Lave, 2001). In the context of Southwest High, Nina was able to construct herself as a “smart student” who did well in her classes and thus graduated in the top 10%. Nina’s identity as smart student thickened over her high school years, across classes, making it difficult for her to accept the emerging identity as “struggling learner” in her Pre-Calculus class in college. The student’s attempt of repositioning herself by drawing on resources available, the math tutor, somehow seemed to confirm her emerging identity as someone who struggled, therefore she chose to walk away from the math center without getting the help that she needed. Later on during her first semester in college, Nina seemed to overcome this initial identity struggle as she started to regularly visit the tutoring center, a resource she found for repositioning herself in her math class.

Likewise, all the other participants improved communication with peers, faculty, and staff, which helped them to navigate coursework. Julie told me that she did not mind asking a question during her English Composition class at BU. She said:

Luciene: And in class? Would you just raise your hand?

Julie: Yeah, sometimes when we had questions like “So you want us to do this?”

“Ok, but I have a question – how can we find out online?” or “How do we put a quote within a quote?” or like whatever, you know. It is simple questions that you wanna ask the professor right there and then. Cause maybe some students don’t know, you know. (Julie, interview, 02/10/2015).

Julie, as the excerpt shows, felt comfortable asking questions in her EC class; however, she, like all the other participants, felt intimidated to do so in larger classes such as psychology. In his math class at CC, Juan usually asked help from classmates or the math tutors who were available to assist students during class time. He told me, “If somebody was next to me, I would ask them or any tutor” (Juan, interview, 10/29/2014). When in need of guidance, Natalia visited her English instructor at BU during her office hours:

Luciene: And with the teacher? Do you talk with her when you need help? Maybe after class?

Natalia: I have been to her office hours I think like three times.

Luciene: Because you decided to do it?

Natalia: Yeah because I was having some doubts about the class but then after that I was like oh, it is gonna go pretty good. (Natalia, Interview, 10/27/2014).

Like Natalia, Cecilia also preferred to communicate with her professors outside of class time at CC. She said, “Sometimes I would ask him [her psychology instructor] questions after the class. And then education, too. I would always talk to him after class if I missed something, or if I needed to improve on something” (Cecilia, Interview, 02/10/2015). As for Nadia and Ana, they also preferred to communicate with professors after class; however, as these students were taking all their classes together, they tended to rely on each other throughout the semester.

Self-monitoring and study strategies.

All of the participants, except for Natalia, reported struggling with the free structure of college where they were responsible for managing their time and monitoring their own progress. For Julie, Ana, and Cecilia, it was difficult to balance time between work and school. Julie told me about how she struggled to keep up with school while working at Walmart:

Luciene: Was there any major life event that impacted your studies the past semester?

Julie: Time management, I guess, because I was working. I needed money to help my grandparents. [At work] They would give me 40 hours a week. I worked 5 days a week so my only days off were Tuesdays and Thursdays. So those days off I would only have time to do homework. On Monday I worked, so I got out Tuesday in the morning. But Monday I didn't sleep so I would go home and sleep and I would wake up at 3 or 4 in the afternoon and when I woke up I would do my homework. And the next day at 11 I would go to school. (Julie, interview, 02/10/2015).

As the excerpt shows, Julie was working full-time night shifts at Walmart in order to financially support herself and contribute to her grandparents with whom she was living. As our interview continued, she told me that at times she would not sleep in order to finish her homework. Ana, who worked at a Mexican food restaurant, also found it difficult to work and study at the same time:

Luciene: So far what has been the biggest challenge in adapting to college?

Ana: Time management. Cause I get out of work like at 8:30 pm so then I am tired. As soon as I shower, I just want to go to sleep. And sometimes I forget "Oh, shoot. I have to turn in this homework by tomorrow." So there I am until midnight doing it. It is like sometimes I find a way to do it earlier like right after school, that hour that I have. But then like sometimes I have to go pay my phone bill or I have to go grocery shopping. (Ana, interview, 11/04/2014).

Ana, like Julie, lived with her grandmother, and felt responsible for providing financial contribution as well as assisting with tasks such as going grocery shopping. Cecilia, who lived with her mother and sisters, also shared her struggles with time management:

Luciene: And why was it so hard to manage your time?

Cecilia: Cause I had school every day so I had to manage with work and stuff.

And I had to pick up my sisters from school and like go home, you know what I mean? So it was like a challenge. But I mean, now I think I could manage it better cause now I know what to expect. (Cecilia, 02/10/2015).

Besides having to balance time between family responsibilities and school, Cecilia ended up having to work many extra hours in order to financially support her family. As a consequence of lacking time to study, Cecilia had to drop her English Composition class at CC. She said:

I liked that class a lot...but then I started to have problems at home so I started working more. So I didn't have time to be working and going to school at the same time. So I was missing out on a lot of things because he would have writing assignments like every day so I wasn't able to keep up with them (Cecilia, interview, 02/10/2015).

Julie's, Cecilia's and Ana's accounts on their difficulties in managing time speaks to need for conceptualizations of college readiness that takes into the current sociocultural context of higher education where "nontraditional" undergraduate students have become majority. According to the report titled *Pathways to success* (2012), even though the term "nontraditional" student is difficult to define, it "was originally used to describe students who tended to delay entry to college from high school, were not from typical socially dominant groups, or were often not full-time students learning in the

classroom” (p. 2). The report also states that the nontraditional students, who may range from “minimally” to “highly” nontraditional, are considered “at-risk” as they either take longer to graduate or drop out of college.

As previously explained, Cecilia, like Ana and Julie, was a nontraditional student who found it difficult to manage time between work, family obligations, and her studies. In addition to structural constraints affecting her time management, Cecilia, who was very outgoing and sociable, also found it hard to say “no” to her friends’ invitations to go out. In the interviews, she told me that she sometimes went partying with her friends and during the week and thus missed some of her morning classes.

Juan and Nadia also reported having problems with time management despite not being working. According to both of them, having too much “free time” led them to procrastinate school work. Juan told me:

Luciene: And why do you think it was so hard to focus?

Juan: [...] since I am having more time, I would go to one class and I would go to another class for like 4 hours. So I would go home and I would just sit there and watch TV or go eat or something like that. And the homework wouldn’t be due for like 2 weeks. So I would just put it off like “Oh, tomorrow, tomorrow.” And tomorrow never came until 12 at night the day before. I guess just having too much free time just gives you the satisfaction of just putting off work that you are obviously not gonna do. So I guess you gotta be more responsible and on top of what you are doing. (Juan, interview, 02/11/2015).

Besides struggling with “too much free time”, Juan, like Cecilia, was also very sociable and really enjoyed partying even during the week. Juan’s academic trajectory during his first

semester in college was marked by difficulty in adapting to the cultural norms of college and, at times, resistance to some of the practices which he did not identify with (Gee, 2012). A deeper discussion on students' identities and literacies will be presented later in this chapter.

When evaluating her first semester of college, Nadia described her difficulty in adapting to the structure of the Community College, which she found very different from high school. Even though the student did not work for the most part of her first semester, she tended to procrastinate. She said:

I think it took me by surprise in some aspects because I was so used to high school and all the norms and everything. And when I got here I was like. It is a completely different scenario and now that it is coming to an end, I know the things that I did wrong. For next semester, I wouldn't do them. Like be more organized, do not procrastinate because that was my biggest issue – procrastination (Nadia, interview, 12/09/2014).

According to Nadia, procrastination was the reason she almost failed her math class. The student, however, was able to catch up with her math class by relying on Ana and math tutors at CC. Similarly, Nina almost failed her pre-calculus class at BU because of her difficulty with managing time and preparing for class and tests. In an interview, she shared her struggles in changing her studying habits:

[...] It is very different from high school, very different. I didn't expect it to be so different. Like I kind of expected to do what I did in high school – not exactly but something like that – but now it is really different. Now you have to focus a lot more and study a lot more. Not what I used to do in high school. I would never sit down and study for hours. (Nina, interview, 10/31/2014).

As the excerpt shows, Nina found the cultural world of the university to be very different from high school. Nonetheless, the student tried to adapt to it and succeed, particularly in her math class, by relying on her boyfriend, also freshman student, and tutors at BU. Like Nina, Natalia also thought that BU was very different from high school; however, Natalia did not seem to struggle with acquiring the study skills that were necessary to succeed in her postsecondary studies. She said: “[In high school] I didn’t use to do the homework. I wouldn’t study. And then I had to change my habits and actually study, and actually do my homework” (Natalia, interview, 02/09/2015). Later on during the interview, Natalia clarified that she did complete all her homework for her high school classes; however, she would do that during class time, thus she never really felt the need to study at home in order to do well in her high school classes.

Summary

This section highlighted the challenges that most of the students faced in adapting to the academic literacies needed for navigating various college-level classes. Most students reported having had difficulties with time management and study strategies because they were not used to having so much “free time”, as some of the students put it. The students, however, did not realize that time outside of the classroom should not always equate with free time. Conley (2007) stresses that time management can be improved with techniques such as estimating time for task completion; using calendars and developing “to do” lists for better organization of tasks and time; and locating adequate studying environments. Additionally, Conley (2007) suggests that time management can be improved by “prioritizing study time in relation to competing demands such as work and socializing” (p. 17). Time for socializing with friends was indeed an aspect that could have been more efficiently managed by some of the participants; however, prioritizing study time over work unfortunately was not a matter of choice for some of the students. At some

point of their first semester in college, Julie, Ana, and Cecilia had to work full-time in order to help with household expenses. In Cecilia's case, financial constraints led her to drop her EC class so as to work more hours. According to a report to the U.S. congress and secretary of education titled *Pathways to success* (2012), nontraditional students like Julie, Ana, and Cecilia are becoming majority in private and public universities across the country. This new trend in higher education calls for a reconceptualization of college readiness as well as the creation of support systems for nontraditional students who, according to the report (2012), are deemed as an "at-risk" group. Most Latino/as, who are increasingly gaining representation at the undergraduate level, fall into the category of nontraditional students as they "hold part-time or full-time, jobs and must balance the competing demands of school, work, and family responsibilities" (Ong, Phinney & Dennis, 2006, p. 962).

Having discussed the challenges participants faced across classes – time management being the most pervasive – the next section explores participants' engagement with three disciplines which required the most reading and/or writing: English Composition, history and psychology.

Disciplinary Literacies and Identities

This section examines participants' identity constructions through engagement with reading and writing within disciplines. Shanahan, Shanahan and Misischia (2011) highlight that disciplinary literacies can be challenging even at the postsecondary level because they not only involve the "domain knowledge of the disciplines" but also "each discipline possesses specialized genre, vocabulary, traditions of communication, and standards of quality and precision, and each requires specific kinds of reading and writing" (p. 395). In this section, I examine students' engagement with the literacy practices of three disciplines: English

Composition, history, and psychology. I conducted three class observations in each of the English Composition classes participants were enrolled in. The observations occurred in the beginning, middle and end of the fall 2014 semester. As one participant, Nina, did not take EC in her first semester of college, I conducted three observations in her history class at BU.

I chose to focus on the analysis of the literacy practices of EC, history, and psychology because: (1) these classes required a greater amount of reading and/or writing; (2) most of the participants were enrolled in those courses; (3) several participants reported having struggled with the literacy practices in one or more of those disciplines. In what follows, I will provide some background information on the contexts of EC classes both at BU and CC. Then I will proceed to the analysis of themes that emerged regarding students' engagement with the literacies of English Composition courses. Finally, I will look at the literacies of history and psychology as these two disciplines shared commonalities in the "way they were done" at both CC and BU.

English Composition at BU

Two of the participants took English Composition in their first semester at BU – Natalia and Julie, whose instructors were Ms. Arnold and Ms. Carlson, respectively. Even though the students were in different classes, their course syllabi were very similar. English Composition courses at BU aimed to develop four major types of writing: exploratory, narrative, analytical, and argumentative. EC classes at BU seemed to place more value in the contextual use of language than in the cognitive aspects of it. The course description below suggests that the English Composition classes at BU were guided by the view of writing as social practice (Lea & Street, 2006; Lea, 2008; Russell et al., 2009):

The goal of English 1311 is to develop students' critical thinking skills in order to facilitate effective communication in all educational, professional, and social contexts. This effective communication is based on an awareness of and appreciation for the discourse communities as well as knowledge specific to the subject matter, genre, rhetorical strategy, and writing process. English 1311 is designed to prepare students for the writing they will do throughout their university experience as well as in professional and civic environments (English Composition syllabus, fall 2014).

As the course description shows, the EC courses at BU placed high emphasis on preparing students to make appropriate choices of language use as they navigate various discourse communities in the university as well as in out-of-school contexts including the work place. The assignments for the course seemed to be very much aligned with the goals of the course. To introduce students to the notion of discourse communities, the students were required to construct a discourse community map. The map should portray the different discourse communities the students participated in as well as "the different literacies needed to be a member" of each community (EC syllabus, fall 2014). A written response was required along with the visual map. Students also had opportunities to develop their critical thinking and discourse community awareness through the completion of a variety of other assignments, many of them were technology-mediated. Those assignments were: the analysis of a community problem report and annotated bibliography (prepared to inform the community problem report); the rhetorical analysis of a text based on the community issue chosen by the student; an "opinion piece" where students presented their views on the community issue; a "visual argument" where the students used multimedia to create an argument regarding the community issue.

In addition to the assignments described, the students, during the entire fall semester, worked on building a website that included their e-portfolio and a blog, which served as a communication tool with their peers and instructors. The students could get a total of 1,000 points in their EC class and most of the assignments were worth 50-100 points. Different from the EC syllabus at CC, as will be shown later, the EC course syllabus at BU did not specify instructor's expectations towards the use of Standard English, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. In terms of assessment, BU's English Composition instructors reported valuing the content of the assignments rather than any other aspect of writing. The excerpts below reflect Ms. Carlson's and Ms. Arnold's, EC instructors at BU, views on content versus language use in assignments:

Grammar to me is like... I guess how I can think about this is like there are those home improvement shows where people come in and they want to fix up the house. Grammar is like the superficial, just to decorate and the content is the structure of the house; its foundation. You can have a messed up paper because somebody can come by and fix it, but if you can't figure out how to organize your thoughts, how to put it together, how to place it in an argument structure where you can convince somebody that you know what you are talking about, then that is the main problem (Ms. Arnold, interview, 12/09/2014).

What really matters is the content. Because I grade by a rubric and we have special things that we need to look through and when it comes to grammar, grammar is a very small percentage of the assignments. It is always about the content - their thoughts, their critical thinking, their rhetorical knowledge, that

kind of stuff, and so that is what I will comment on (Ms. Carlson, interview, 01/27/2015).

As the excerpts show, the two English Composition instructors at BU seemed to see content – organization, critical thinking, and rhetorical knowledge – as the most important aspect of writing. In the next section, I describe English Composition classes at the Community College.

English Composition at CC

Three participants – Juan, Nadia and Ana – completed their English Composition class in the fall 2014 semester. They were enrolled in the same class taught by their former high school English teacher, Ms. Martinez. Approximately one month after the beginning of the classes in fall 2014, one student, Cecilia, dropped her EC class for financial reasons. Cecilia's EC class was taught by Mr. Delgado.

Similar to BU, English Composition courses at CC aimed to develop four major types of writing: exploratory, narrative, analytical, and argumentative. Unlike BU, however, EC classes at the Community College drew on more traditional approaches to writing, with very limited use of technology and perhaps more focus on the cognitive aspect of writing. The course description read:

English 1311 emphasizes intensive study and practice in writing processes, from invention and researching to drafting, revising, and editing both individually and collaboratively. Emphasizes effective rhetorical choices, including audience, purpose, arrangement, and style. Focuses on the writing of academic essays as vehicle for learning, communicating, and critical analyses (English composition syllabus, fall 2014).

As I observed the English Composition classes at CC, the students indeed spent most of the class time engaged in drafting, revising, editing and sometimes peer-reviewing essays. In the fall 2014 semester, five major essays were required for the EC classes I observed: an argumentation with documentation; a compare/contrast; a literacy narrative; a descriptive and a process essay. One of these essays was done in class as a final exam. All the essays should be 2-3 pages long and be written in MLA style. As stated in the class syllabus, the students who got a grade lower than 70 in any of the essays were eligible for “remediation.” The “remediation” policy allowed the student to redo the essay; however, upon turning in the new version of the essay, the student was required to show a written proof of his or her visit to the writing tutoring center. While the essays comprised 70% of students’ grades, the other 30% were distributed among class discussions, quizzes, and assignments based on the reading of the textbook chapters. The textbooks were: *A writer’s reference with writing about literature* and *The Norton field guide to writing with readings*. The latter introduced students to basic concepts of grammar use and provided writing tips such as developing a thesis and transitioning to a new paragraph; the book was very focused on the processes of drafting, revising and editing essays.

According to the English Composition class syllabi, one of the goals of that class was to have students “demonstrate an understanding of Standard Written English in terms of grammatical sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, mechanics, and usage.” Even though this statement corroborates the overall traditional teaching approach in English Composition classes at CC in comparison to the Borderland University, Mr. Delgado, EC instructor at CC, reported placing more value on content over form in his students’ writing. The instructor shared his views on writing assessment during the interviews:

I am pretty much descriptivist when it comes to teaching grammar and so I teach conventions depending on specific rhetorical situations. So I don't emphasize grammar as much. I just kind of focus more on their ideas – whether they are getting the concepts, whether they are meeting the specific requirements for the exam in terms of whether they are making arguments, whether they are informing, whether they are integrating sources (Mr. Delgado, Interview, 12/12/2014).

While Mr. Delgado reported not focusing on grammar when assessing students' writing, Ms. Gutierrez, the other CC instructor I interviewed, seemed to equally value format and content. She told me how she assessed her students' research papers, a requirement for her EC class:

For the first part of the paper it was more format-based to see if they cited things correctly and so I was looking, of course, at the grammar and things like that cause for me it's very hard to read a paper that is not grammatically correct. I understand that there usually are small errors which is fine but you saw their papers [chuckles] and it's hard to get through that. So Mostly, I look at grammar first and then the next draft, I focus on content and hopefully those errors are gone (Ms. Gutierrez, interview, 12/09/2014).

In the above excerpt, Ms. Martinez explained her balanced approach to assessing students' writing – she valued both content and format. Even though EC instructors at BU and CC showed mixed opinions on the assessment of students' writing, most of them agreed that content was more important. Furthermore, in the interviews with the participants, all of them felt that their instructors placed more value in the content of their writing rather than the format.

Literacy Practices in English Composition

Having described the contexts of EC courses both at Bu and CC, I now explore themes related to EC courses at CC and BU. These themes emerged in the analysis of individual interviews, focus group interviews, field notes taken during class observations, and artifacts such as students' essays and blogs.

Self-representation in academic writing.

The notion of impersonal versus personal writing is strongly challenged in the field of composition studies. For compositionists, all genres of writing always convey "voice"; however, skillful authors are able to negotiate voice or self-representation in the production of texts (Bartholomae, 1985; Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Zamel, 1998). Self-representation in writing emerged as a recurrent theme during the interviews when students were specifically asked about which types of writing they enjoyed or did not enjoy in their college classes. Because English Composition, both at CC and BU, allowed for the production of a variety of texts, including more "personal" ones, Ana, Nadia, and Juan identified with most of the writing done for those classes. Ana, for example, explained why she enjoyed a particular piece of writing in her EC class:

Luciene: Which types of writing did you really enjoy doing?

Ana: The literacy narrative cause it was like first person.

Luciene: And what did you write about specifically?

Ana: My first love. How I met (boyfriend). Like how I overcame being shy because

I texted him first. (Ana, interview, 11/04/2014).

In the excerpt above, Ana specifically states that she enjoyed the writing the literacy narrative because of the use of first person. The student also chose to write about a topic she deeply connected with – her boyfriend – who she identified as an important source of support during her high school years and first semester of college. In her literacy narrative, Ana described how she felt free to express her feelings toward her boyfriend through text messages and letters. By the same token, Nadia, who really liked to express her opinions on different topics and usually used *Facebook* as vehicle to do so, told me why her EC class was her favorite one, “I think when it comes down to Mrs. Martinez’s class I can really express what I feel about the topic.” (Nadia, interview, 10/28/2014). Like Ana, her favorite writing assignment was a narrative in which she described how difficult it was to lose her grandfather.

As for Juan, the piece of writing he enjoyed the most during his first semester of college was a descriptive essay in which he wrote about an emotional event – his cousin’s graduation. Juan told me that he enjoyed any type of writing that allowed for self-expression. Perhaps one of the best examples of Juan’s use of writing as a tool for self-expression was his narrative essay titled “College is Hell”. Below is an excerpt from Juan’s narrative essay which serves as a lens to understand his struggles with academic literacies and identities in his first semester of college:

I get home and my mom asks me if I did it, “Yes classes start in August” I said. She smiles and hugs me and tell me that everything will be fine, I knew everything would be fine but I also knew something would go terribly wrong. You remember when you were in high school and many of the recruiters for college would say over and over again, “Don’t worry about a thing, you will have so much free time to spend with your friends and have fun as well as studying and doing your

homework”. Well, all that was bulls@!*!! (Juan, narrative essay excerpt, 11/04/2014).

The excerpt sheds light on Juan’s difficulty in negotiating academic literacies and identities in his transition to college. Juan’s “voice” is made very clear through the use very informal language, exclamation marks, and honesty regarding his feelings about college. Other evidences of his difficulty adapting to academic literacies were arriving late to class, sitting in the back of his EC class while talking and giggling with peers, and missing deadline for his English assignments (field notes, 09/16/2014 and 10/21/2014). Latino male college students negative coping behaviors was found in previous research. Gloria and Castellanos (2012) found that, while Latinas draw on peers as support systems to persist in college, Latinos tend to have “later- and less-organized coping responses” (p. 90).

Technology-mediated literacies.

All English Composition instructors at BU were required to integrate technology in their classes whereas EC instructors at CC could choose whether to use it or not. In Ms. Martinez’s class at CC, the use of technology was limited to the typing of assignments and use of databases. The integration of technology in EC classes at BU, however, seemed to be beneficial to students. Julie and Natalia, for example, were required to develop an e-portfolio which not only contained all their assignments but also included the students’ reflections on their progress, and their reflections on the major assignments they had done. The excerpt below, retrieved from Natalia’s e-portfolio, demonstrates her use of blogging to reflect on her progress as a writer:

I remember when I entered college I was afraid of failing my English class. During my high school years English was one of my weaknesses. I never really liked writing, and the thought of writing an essay made me hate it even more. Now that

we are almost done with the semester I can pretty much say that my fear of writing is not the same as before. I can say that my writing has somewhat improved since the beginning of the semester. I actually pay more attention to what I am writing now. I want to make it sound smart that way my professors can see that I am not just another student that needs help while writing. I double check everything I write, and I even read it out loud to make sure it all makes sense (Natalia, blog post, 2014).

The excerpt shows how blogging was used as a metacognitive tool for the students to monitor their progress. Moreover, the excerpt suggests Natalia's identity reconstruction as a writer across space and time. In the space of high school Natalia identified herself as someone who feared writing and considered writing to be one of her weaknesses. Nonetheless, as Natalia started to engage with writing in the space of college, she seemed to have gained confidence in her abilities as an author. This confidence seems to have stemmed from the use of writing strategies, possibly reinforced in her English Composition class, such as revising and reading the text aloud to see if it makes sense. Blogging, as a metacognitive tool itself, might have helped Natalia to gain confidence in her abilities as a writer. Most importantly, her reconstruction from a "weak" writer to someone who improved in writing seems to have been driven by the student's aspiration to be recognized, in the space of college specifically, as a "smart student" rather than "just another student that needs help while writing" (Natalia, blog post, 2014).

The students at CC also had the opportunity to reflect on their own learning in their EC class. Their reflection, however, was done on paper during class time at the end of the fall 2014 semester and was graded as a final exam. Perhaps blogging was a more effective tool for self-expression and reflection as opposed to paper-based writing which may be perceived as more

conventional and thus threatening. In my second interview with Julie, the student explained why she enjoyed the blogging assignments at BU:

Luciene: Which types of writing did you enjoy doing?

Julie: *Pues*, I would go with the English one. I guess it is because you learn more.

Like, on the web link [blog], the one that we are creating, we do the assignments and then after that we do a reflection. If we liked it or not. So let's say, the annotated bibliography, the one that we just did, on the side we have to put our reflection. We have to talk about what we liked, what we disliked, what we improved. That makes you realize that, I mean, I did learn something (Julie, interview, 11/07/2014).

For Julie, the blog reflections on the class assignments were not only a means for self-expression but also an artifact that helped her to realize that her EC class at BU helped her development as a student. It is important to note that Julie always enjoyed writing even though she reported struggling with it. In high school, she was in Journalism in order to improve her writing. Julie's dedication to becoming a better writer was also seen in her favorite college class – English composition. Even though Julie worked 40 hours a week, she always made time to work hard on her English assignments. The student often requested my help to develop and revise her assignment before submission. At the end of the fall 2014 semester, Julie was proud to tell me that she passed her English class with a B, two points short from getting an A. Thus, in her English class, Julie had the opportunity to author herself as a “good student”, but unfortunately, as I will discuss later, her educational trajectory was not linear in all her classes.

This section showed students' engagement with the literacies of EC classes. Specifically, it explored participants' identification with the writing assignments that allowed for self-

expression. Most of the participants enrolled in EC were able to position themselves as “good students”, passing them with an A or a B. Even though Juan enjoyed his English class at CC, he was the only participant almost failing the course, but eventually passing it with a C. The analysis of the interviews with Juan, the interview with his EC instructor, his writing samples, and my field notes taken during class observations revealed that the student resisted some academic practices. By sitting in the back of the class, joking and giggling with his peers during lectures, arriving late for class, and not respecting deadlines for some of his assignments, Juan positioned himself and was positioned as a “struggling”, “disruptive” student (Wortham, 2004) in his English class. During interviews, Juan also reported some “disruptive” behavior in his history class which he described as his “most boring class.” During history lectures, he had the habit of sitting in the back, talking loud and laughing, and sometimes sleeping through the lectures.

The next section will examine students’ engagement with the literacies of psychology and history, which many participants found the most challenging classes in their first semester of college. I chose to address these two disciplines together rather than separate because the literacy practices they involved were very similar both across classes and institutions.

History and Psychology at CC and BU

All of the participants, except for Julie, took history in their first semester of college. Both at CC and BU, History I covered events in the American history since the pre-Columbian period until the Civil War. Even though history classes at the undergraduate level often contain a large number of students, the history classes that participants were enrolled in at BU and CC had approximately 25 students. In both institutions, the main form of assessment in history were multiple choice tests accompanied by short analytical essays; however, Juan’s history instructor

at CC as well as Nina's history instructor at BU also assigned a final paper. The use of technology in history classes across institutions was minimal – Blackboard was used for the purpose of storing class materials such as course syllabi and power points used by the instructors in previous lectures. Regarding psychology, three of this study's participants enrolled in this discipline in their first semester of college: Cecilia, at CC, and Julie and Nina at BU. While psychology classes at CC had approximately 25 students, at BU these classes contained over 100 students. Psychology instructors at both institutions relied on tests as main forms of assessment. In addition to multiple choice assessments, Cecilia had to do a group presentation on ADHD, one of the topics covered during the fall 2014 semester at CC. As for the students at BU, besides multiple choice assessments, they had weekly open-book quizzes administered on Blackboard. Furthermore, as part of their grades, the students enrolled in psychology at BU had the choice to either participate in research experiments or write papers on research experiments.

In the next section, I explore participants' engagement with the literacies of psychology and history. For several participants, these disciplines were challenging because they involved a great amount of information which was mostly assessed through multiple choice tests. In addition to that, participants also seemed to have struggled with the instructional methods, especially in history classes, which many of the participants described as "boring."

Literacy Practices in Psychology and History

The literacy practices of psychology and history were combined in this section due to their similarities. As scholars have noted, history and science-related disciplines can be challenging for their dense, abstract, and technical features of language (Moje, 2007; Shanahan et al., 2011; Schleppegrell, 2004). Even though some of the participants mentioned the difficulties of reading old documents in history and understanding technical vocabulary in

psychology, their greatest challenge, according to them, was to manage the large amount of information these disciplines involved. Despite the amount of information Cecilia, at CC, and Nina, at BU, showed motivation in learning psychology as they found this discipline interesting. Cecilia shared her view on her psychology class:

I passed [psychology] with a B. It was really easy too. I liked him. He was a really good teacher. He knew what he was saying. His tests were really good like it was the material that he was talking about all the time. And he would refresh our memories like all the time, you know what I mean? It wasn't just give us something and later not even revise it again. He would refer back to it and stuff. So it was really good. I liked him. (Cecilia, Interview, 02/10/2015).

As the excerpt shows, Cecilia succeeded in her psychology class. It seems that the acquisition of content-knowledge was facilitated by her instructor's pedagogical practice of revising the material learned throughout the semester. The student also liked the fact that her instructor assigned a final project which could be done with a classmate. Cecilia and her classmate then developed a project on ADHD and presented it in class. Cecilia reported having enjoyed the project and learnt from it. She told me:

We did [our project on] ADHD [...] We had to present it like in front of the people and in front of the teacher like telling us about it and stuff. I feel that we learned in that class. And we passed (Cecilia, interview, 02/10/2015).

Moje (2007) explains that enculturation into a discipline requires opportunities for the students to actively engage with the literacy practices of the discipline. The project Cecilia had to develop for her psychology class might have been helpful in enculturating her into the discipline as she was required to read about a topic, negotiate meanings with her peer, prepare and deliver a

presentation. Nina's psychology instructor at BU also sought to facilitate learning through active engagement with the coursework. In a focus group interview, Nina told me:

In my psychology class, I have to read the chapter and then create my own questions. But you have a good amount of time to do it. You have a few days a week so whenever I have time I do that" (Nina, Focus group at BU, 09/19/2014).

Nina's instructor promoted learning from psychology texts by having students generate their own questions while reading class material. Even though this reading strategy can be used in any content area, it is especially helpful in the reading of dense texts (Readence & Bean, 2004). Thus, despite the amount of information conveyed in psychology classes, Cecilia and Nina managed to succeed in psychology because their instructors used disciplinary literacy strategies that seemed to support students' appropriation of disciplinary discourses (Moje, 2007). Julie, on the other hand, reported having greatly struggled with psychology at BU. In our second interview, she told me:

I am failing one class. I am failing my psychology and it is really, really, really hard [...] For now we have two exams and three quizzes, so if you have those low grades it is not gonna balance out your grade, you know. That's why I like more assignments than doing quizzes. Assignments keep you active and stuff. You search the material. And with quizzes, you are just getting information, information over information without learning anything, you know? That's how I see it cause if you do the activities like on paper and stuff you tend to know more about the material than just hearing a presentation without going over the stuff, you know? (Julie, interview, 11/07/2014).

In the excerpt above Julie complained about the great amount of information in her psychology class. Unlike Cecilia's and Nina's psychology instructors, Julie's instructor did not draw on disciplinary literacy pedagogies to support appropriation of the discourses of psychology. Julie was also upset with the fact that assessment in her psychology class was based on quizzes and exams only. Overwhelmed by the amount of information conveyed orally and through power points in class, the student felt that she was not learning anything. In an attempt to reposition herself in that class, Julie relied on two classmates with whom she studied for tests, sat together during class time, and shared notes. In our last interview Julie regretfully told me that, despite her efforts, she had gotten an F in her psychology class.

The literacies of history classes were similar to psychology, thus some participants struggled with managing so much information conveyed both through power points and the instructors' explanations about the chapters, which did not necessarily correspond to what was written on the power points. Ana said, "For history, her power points don't have anything to do with what she is saying. So sometimes I write what she says on the power point and then whatever she says I write it on the side" (Ana, interview, 11/04/2014). Nina complained about the amount of notetaking in her history class at BU, "[...] what I don't like [about history] is that it feels too long and it is all notes, notes, notes. That's all we are doing" (Interview, 10/31/2014). Another factor that seemed to have impacted learning in history classes was that all the students found it "boring". Cecilia stated, "I have always loved history but this year it is just like boring. It is just different. I don't know. I guess it is just the teacher that is really. I don't know. That's just weird" (Cecilia, interview, 10/28/2014). For some participants, studying history was just pointless. In the focus group interview, Juan and Ana said:

Luciene: Juan, you don't like history?

Juan: No, I don't like it. It bored me.

Ana: I don't see the purpose why we have to study history. Like for accounting, what am I gonna do for history? Why do I need to know that?

Juan: Yeah, I am taking history until 1865 and I don't even know why I am taking it. My major is architecture. It makes no sense (Focus group, 09/19/2014).

The students, as the excerpt shows, felt disconnected from the discipline of history for not seeing the relevance of it and for the teaching methods - lecture and power points - which "bored" them. In discussing socially just pedagogies, Moje (2007) highlights the need for secondary and postsecondary educators to connect diverse students' everyday discourses and disciplinary discourses. For the reading of history texts, it is imperative that students are encouraged to draw on their background knowledge, interpret, analyze, and critique content-knowledge (Moje, 2007). Moje (2007) argues that when history teachers fail to encourage these literacy practices in their classes, "youth learn to take up history as series of undisputed facts rather than as a practice of constructing an evidence-based account of events shaped by the author's perspective, background, and temporal location, among other factors" (p. 19). Perhaps the Latino/a youth in this study would have felt more motivated to learn history if they had received explicit instruction on the epistemology of this discipline and had been taught strategies to better make sense of content-knowledge.

Besides struggling with the disengaging instructional methods of history, three students, Nadia, Ana, and Cecilia, who were enrolled in the same history class at CC, expressed frustration with their instructor, Ms. Reynolds, mainly because her review guides did not reflect the test content. Ana complained about that in the interview:

My history teacher in school would help us understand what we were doing. Maybe sometimes showing videos for me is helpful in history cause I don't understand. Maybe just going over exactly what she is expecting from us because the review that she gave us, I went to go talk to her and she told me that it was just for us to have an idea about how she asks questions. Not what was gonna come on the test so, you know what I mean? (Ana, interview, 11/04/2014)

First-year college students generally find it difficult to figure out what their professors' expectations for assignments are (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012); nonetheless, Ana's statement suggests disappointment with the fact that, differently from high school teachers, her college instructor did not provide students with reviews that reflected the exact content of the test. Nadia faced the same issue in the beginning of the semester when she got a really low grade for history. We talked about that in our last interview:

Luciene: And what about that problem that everybody got a bad grade?

Nadia: I think it was just because we were really expecting for all the answers that she gave us to be in the test and it can't be like that cause it is a test, you know. So I think that we were expecting that like in high school.

Luciene: And did she tell you guys that? Did you complain?

Nadia: She talked about it. She said that we need to understand that it was gonna be tied into the test but it was not gonna be the same as the test. (Interview, 12/09/2014).

Nadia's excerpt points to her emerging identity as college student as she acknowledged that, in order to succeed in her classes, she would have to figure out and appropriate the ways of knowing and doing things in the context of college-level history class (Gee, 2012; Hungerford-

Kresser, 2008; Zamel, 1998). Ana, even though not satisfied with multiple choice assessments, and Nadia ended up passing their history class with a C. Despite performing well in short analytical answers in her history tests, Cecilia ended up dropping that class for her low performance in the multiple choice portion of her tests. In the interview, Cecilia explained why she did not adapt to the literacies of her history class:

It is because she would teach us, she would like lecture the whole time. She would just do the power points and we would just take notes, but when it came to the test, it was like nothing like the power points. And she also gave us a study guide but it was like really, really long and it was so much new stuff that we had to learn, you know what I mean? That was not even part of the power points that she would present in class. So it was different. I didn't like it so I just dropped it (Cecilia, interview, 02/10/2015).

Cecilia's excerpt shows that she had difficulty adapting to the way history was done in her class. She felt bored by the use of power points and complained that the study guide provided by the teacher did not match the information conveyed through power points. Cecilia's complaint may suggest that, at that point in time, she had not yet developed the understanding that power points are supposed to be a synthesis of the class content, and therefore it is important to also take notes on what the professor says during the lecture. Thus, Cecilia was still unable to figure out the literacies of history, which led her to drop that class. The struggles faced by Ana, Cecilia, and Nadia regarding their assumptions that tests should reflect exactly what they studied in the review guides may suggest inadequate academic preparation at the secondary level. Even though these Ana, Cecilia, and Nadia were considered "good students" in high school, their secondary-level classes might not have demanded much critical thinking. In fact, critical thinking has been

identified as an area where first-year college students are usually underprepared (Conley, 2007). Under-preparation in critical thinking is particularly noted in low income public schools where economic and ethnic diverse students are “taught-to-the-test” by teachers who, often times, are underqualified and hold low expectations for their students (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Chandler et al., 2014; Delgado-Gaitan, 2013; Hochschild, 2003). In addition to poor academic preparation at the secondary level, college history instructors also seemed to have failed to develop the critical skills needed to engage with history texts. College classes, both at CC and BU, did not promote teacher-student as well as student-student interactions. As I was able to witness, history instructors seemed to be very concerned with delivering a large amount of content which students struggled to make sense of without being explicitly taught to think analytically and critically on the context of historical accounts and on the perspective through which textbook readings were written.

Writing in history.

Most of the students enrolled in history classes were, to different extents, required to engage with the writing of short essays that involved analysis and comparisons of information sources. Even though all the students found the writing done for history “boring” for not allowing for self-expression, they reported having done well on these activities, favoring them over multiple choice tests. A positive aspect of writing tasks in history classes at CC and BU, as reported by the participants, was that all instructors valued the content of their essays and paid minimal attention to the mechanics of writing. In our last interview Cecilia described her performance in essays versus multiple choice tasks:

We had like essays due and I passed, like I got a good grade. But then like the tests would come and I would fail them like bad. So they were really

bad. I mean, the essays, she would ask us questions for an essay and I already knew. That was the only thing that helped me to bump up my grade. But the multiple choice and the tests were really hard. (Cecilia, interview, 02/10/2015).

Like Cecilia, Ana also complained about their history instructor's multiple choice tests and reported having done well on essay writing:

Luciene: Alright then. And the final one for history?

Ana: It was a test and an essay.

Luciene: And the essay?

Ana: I did good. It was just that the multiple choices were really tricky. And then you had to do fill in the blanks.

Ana's interview excerpt not only reinforces the notion that essays seemed to be more fair than multiple choice tests but also it casts doubt on the quality of her history assessments which contained "fill in the blanks" activities. Juan's history instructor, on the other hand, always used assessments mostly based on writing. In the excerpt below, Juan described his history assessments:

On the test he [instructor] would put like 20 or 25 historical events or people and for each one you had to put three important points and give two or three sentences like summary of what the battle was, what the event was, what this person did, what he was. So it wasn't that hard. It was just remembering (Juan, interview, 02/11/2014).

Juan also had a final research project which, according to him, helped him pass his history class with a B. Likewise, Nina's instructor at BU also valued writing both through in-

class assessment and a final project. Nina told me, “The history exam is all writing [...] She gives you like 5 questions and you have to choose like one question and write it down as an essay. I did *good*. I passed with a B” (Nina, interview, 02/13/2015). Finally, Natalia was able to pass her history class at BU with a B, but also reported having struggled with multiple choice quizzes. She said, “My history class, at the beginning it was hard. Well, not even hard. It is just that the quizzes. I wouldn’t pass them. I would get like a 50’s and then 70’s and then they started going up. I started getting 80’s, 100’s” (Natalia, interview, 02/09/2015). Natalia is an example of how students reposition themselves after learning “the rules of the game”, meaning mastering the literacies and conventions of the discipline as well as understanding professor’s expectations (Lea, 2008) in order to be recognized as a legitimate member of a group (Gee, 2012).

As the section on disciplinary literacies showed, participants’ trajectories across classes were not linear. While some participants struggled with study strategies required for success in a particular discipline, others had difficulty understanding exactly what their professors’ expectations were and also acquiring the literacy practices that very much differed from participants’ pre-college academic experiences. Perhaps the participants enrolled in history and psychology classes could have benefitted from active learning strategies. According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), active learning is any class activity that “involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing” (p. 2). Since the mid-1980’s researchers have highlighted the link between active learning in college classes and persistence (Bonwell, & Eison, 1991; Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh et al., 2006). In their study to examine the influence of active learning in first-year college classes, Braxton, Milem, Sullivan (2000) found that class discussions and higher order thinking activities (i.e. inquiry-based activities) promote students’ engagement, which in turn, enhance their sense of

belonging to the academic community, thus contributing to their academic persistence. The researchers point out that active learning is particularly beneficial to minoritized students who may feel more disconnected from the culture of the university (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000).

Summary

This section showed how students engaged with the literacies of English Composition, history, and psychology. Both at BU and CC, the students preferred the literacies of EC over other classes because they had more opportunities to represent themselves in academic writing. BU students engaged much more in technology-mediated literacies such as blogging. This type of activity seemed to be very useful as a non-threatening tool for students to reflect on their own learning. As for the literacies of history and psychology, I presented them in the same section because of their similarities – both classes involved a large amount of information, mostly conveyed through textbooks, lecture, and power points; therefore, note taking ability was important for success in these classes. Some of the students struggled with history and psychology mainly because of the amount of information conveyed. Julie, for example, failed her psychology class at BU for feeling overwhelmed by so much information and not having been able to learn anything, as she put it. As for history, besides struggling with the volume of information, some of the students found it “boring” and purposeless. Perhaps participants’ academic engagement with the disciplines of psychology and history would have been more positive if active learning strategies had been used by college instructors both at CC and BU. As the literature on college success has consistently showed, active learning not only fosters students’ integration into the academic community, but also enhances learning by turning classroom content more meaningful to students (Bonwell, & Eison, 1991; Braxton, Milem &

Sullivan, 2000; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh et al., 2006). Furthermore, research findings indicate that active learning promotes persistence among first-year college students, especially students from economically and ethnically diverse backgrounds (Braxton et al. 2000).

Besides the challenges previously mentioned, some of the students enrolled in history classes had difficulty in figuring out what their professors expected from them. At CC, Ana and Nadia, for example, almost failed their history class while Cecilia decided to drop this class. These students did not know how to prepare for the history tests. Specifically, these students were frustrated with their history instructor because they thought that the study guides for test preparation did not exactly reflect the test content. The fact that Ana, Nadia and Cecilia struggled with developing the critical thinking required to perform successfully in their history exams brings to light the issue of academic preparedness at the secondary level. Even though these students were considered “good students” in high school for their high performance in all or almost all of their classes, they must have been used to the “teach-to-test” methodology that is predominant in the public school system, especially in low income and ethnically diverse communities (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Chandler et al., 2014; Delgado-Gaitan, 2013; Hochschild, 2003). At the postsecondary level, history instructors also seemed to have failed to promote critical thinking in their classes by explicitly teaching students to analyze and critique texts by drawing on their background knowledge and standpoints (Moje, 2007; Shanahan et al., 2011). Inadequate disciplinary literacy pedagogies led the students to perceive history as purposeless and “boring.” For Julie, her most challenging class at BU was psychology where she ended up getting an F. She found the class difficult not only because of the amount of information covered but also because of its assessment tools which were limited to multiple choice quizzes and tests.

Reflections on First Semester of College

This section is divided into two subsections: the first presents students' views on the role of their secondary school in preparing them for college-level coursework. The second subsection presents students' reflections and an analysis of their own trajectories from high school to college taking into account in and out-of-school factors that seemed to impact, either positively or negatively, their persistence in college.

Students' Perspectives on their Academic Preparedness

In the first interviews conducted during high school, all of the students talked about college with excitement and most of them reported feeling prepared for college-level coursework. Throughout their first semester in college, however, the students became increasingly critical regarding their academic experiences in high school. The analysis of focus groups and individual interviews revealed that most students felt underprepared for the academic literacies of college, particularly in what pertains to study habits. In the interviews, all of the students ascribed their inefficient study habits to their high school teachers' lack of rigor in relation to assignment requirements and deadlines. The excerpts below are evidences of that:

In high school, I think they gave us a lot of opportunities. They were like "Oh, you have a bad grade. You can fix it"; "Oh, you have this, you can do this to help to get your grade up." And everything was so easy then ...It is like they baby you or whatever in high school. They just want you to pass and then they do whatever it takes for you to pass, but here [in college] it is like if you don't wanna pass, you don't wanna pass. (Natalia, interview, 02/09/2015)

Cause they would let us turn in late things, you know what I mean? They would like let us slide a lot and here it is like you don't. If you don't bring it when it is due, it is over. They are not on you like 24/7 telling you "Where is your work?" "Where is your work?" (Cecilia, interview, 02/10/2015).

In high school I would have liked that the teachers give the assignments that college professors give or how the professors teach the students. Or how, ok, you had to meet a certain deadline. But in high school they would give you extra time "ok, take it home; come back, bring it back." It is not the same as here, you know. Like they don't tell you "Ok, go back and do it." You have a chance and that is the only chance you have, you know (Julie, interview, 02/10/2015).

In the excerpts above, the students highlighted some key differences from high school to college. For Natalia, high school teachers just wanted students "to pass" their classes, therefore students were given many opportunities to redo homework or turn it in late. Cecilia also emphasized how high school teachers led them "slide a lot", and Julie regretted not having had opportunities to develop college-level assignments in high school. Additionally, Julie regretted the leniency of teachers in relation to deadlines. Nadia, Nina and Ana referred to college as a place where you become independent whereas in high school, teachers treat students "like babies."

In the focus group interview at CC, Cecilia, Ana, Nadia and Juan made strong links between their high school teachers' leniency to low expectations:

Luciene: What about the teachers' expectations?

Nadia: I think it's like whatever. They don't really. I don't know. Like I said, sometimes they let people slack a lot so they don't really, you know? They don't

really put consequences to people that don't do anything. They are just like whatever.

Ana: They already like expect bad from them.

Nadia: Yeah, so they are like used to it.

Juan: they don't push them to do better because they already know they are gonna do bad.

Cecilia: Yeah. I don't know like you try to do your work and turn it in on time and you put all your effort on it just to know that they give you more time on it, you know what I mean? So they don't give you extra credit for actually doing it on time.

You know what I mean? Like that. (Focus group at CC, 09/19/2014).

The students' perceptions of their teachers' low expectations towards them at least partly explain why many of the participants struggled with the literacies of college. Perhaps Cecilia is the best example of how teachers' low expectations may negatively shape students' identities. In the excerpt above, Cecilia agreed that her high school teachers had low expectations for the students and regretted that all students were treated in the same way whether they turned in their work on time or not. In our last interview, Cecilia once again brought up the issue of teachers' leniency in relation to deadlines; I asked her if she used to turn in her homework on time and she answered:

I would always be like turning in my stuff but then I would get mad when they would give everybody else a chance, you know what I mean? And you would have it on time, and they wouldn't have it on time. And they would still give like, "Oh, well, then just turn it in next time." So I would get like so mad so I would just stop

doing it until she was actually like, “Ok, now it is time.” So I would actually just turn it in late (Interview, 02/10/2015).

As the excerpt shows, Cecilia became aware of the shared practices that structured her high school classes – the majority of the students turned in late homework and got the same grade that she did for turning in her work on time. Over time, Cecilia started to “master” the practices that were common to the group (Gee, 2012), that is, she started to act like most of them. The figured world of college, however, was structured by rigid norms and rules, leaving almost no room for procrastination or second chances (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012). In the interviews, Juan strongly blamed his secondary school for his under-preparation regarding time management and study skills. Referring to high school as a “playground” where teachers “are not really strict about like the assignments”, he added:

In high school you are so used to like. Even if you don’t do your homework, you still pass. It doesn’t matter if you turn it in a month late. Like, they will still take it and they will still give you 100, if you get a 100. It is stupid (Juan, interview, 10/29/2014).

Juan’s strong statement supports the notion that students’ perceptions of high school contributed to shaping their identities which, in turn, impacted their academic trajectories through their first semester of college. Simply put, most students struggled with developing identities as college students because they became used to the leniency of high school teachers and the easiness of classroom assignments. As the focus group interview excerpt showed, some of the participants interpreted the leniency of their high school teachers as low expectations for the students. The issue of teachers’ low expectations towards economically disadvantaged students as well as ethnically minoritized students has been well documented by educational

researchers. In her ethnographic study at a public high school in Texas, Angela Valenzuela (1999) found many evidences of low expectations from teachers, staff and policymakers towards Mexican and Mexican American youth. The lack of care was evident in the school's non-rigorous curriculum as well as in pedagogies that were not responsive to the students' culturally and linguistically backgrounds. Additionally, the school's overcrowding and underfunding reflected indifference on the part of policymakers.

Preparedness in academic writing.

With regard to academic writing, all of the students agreed that the only on-level high school class that actually prepared them for college-level writing was their English IV class which required them to write a research paper. In our last interviews, participants stated, "In high school, the only thing that helped us a lot was the research paper. If it weren't for the research paper, high school wouldn't have helped, you know" (Julie, interview, 02/10/2015)." "The only one [class] that did help was Ms. Martinez's. Like she helped with our last essay but other than that, not really" (Cecilia, interview, 02/09/2015). Natalia shared her views on how academic writing was typically taught in high school:

In high school they would focus more on you trying to pass your test – the TAKS or the STAAR - not prepare you for college... they would always show us how to write short answers or how to write an essay but it was like a one or two-page essay, not five or whatever pages you get here in college (Interview, 02/09/2015).

Natalia's remarks on how academic writing was taught in her high school echo Ruecker's (2012; 2013) study findings which showed that both teachers and students thought that the teaching and learning of academic writing at the research site, a borderland high school, were

constrained by high-stakes testing. The teaching-to-the TAKS approach to writing found in Ruecker's (2012; 2013) study was much more evident in regular/on-level English classes than in AP classes. Similarly, in this study the students who had been in AP classes before highlighted differences between these classes and on-level classes. Nina told me:

[AP classes] I think that the AP classes helped me a lot. It opened my mind on how to write. I can tell the difference between the way an AP student writes and a regular English student writes ... more developed, more, I don't know. The structure is different. [...] I think it is just the way you express yourself, it is a lot more different. You use a lot more similes, more metaphors, they teach you a lot more, I think (Interview, 05/19/2014).

Nina thought that her AP classes were more demanding and focused on teaching students more elaborated writing. Ana shared the same view also adding that, in AP classes, she usually got more feedback from teachers and the amount of writing was also significant as compared to on-level English classes. Ana said, "I remember that in junior year we would write a lot of essays, a lot of essays. And I think like now for English [in college] it's helpful" (Ana, Interview, 09/19/2014). Hochschild (2003) asserts that social inequalities are perpetuated in American public schools across states, school districts, schools within a district, and classes within the same school. Advanced Placement classes, for example, can contribute to maintaining inequalities as poor schools are less likely to offer AP courses than schools in wealthier and predominantly Anglo communities. Furthermore, ability-grouping such as AP courses were found to segregate students by race and class (Rubin, 2006). Rubin (2006) asserts that, "Tracking can be seen as a vital part of how schools reproduce inequality, a structural arrangement through

which individuals come to accept their own socioeconomic positions as inevitable and natural” (p. 5).

“Tracking” practices may not only perpetuate inequalities but also affect students’ self-perceptions. In this study, for example, Ana argued that on-level English classes in her high school had to be slow-paced so that everyone could follow. AP classes, on the other hand, were fast-paced, therefore designed for “smart” students. In her words, “In AP classes you have to be smart; you have to understand it. Mostly everybody picks it up fast” (Ana, interview, 05/06/2014). Ana thought of AP classes as a place for “smart” students or “fast learners” whereas on-level classes were places for “slower learners.” These implicit labels/positionings can significantly impact learning outcomes they imply success and failure. As Bartlett (2007) explains, the figured world of success and failure in U.S. schools, “are invoked in local events by cultural artifacts such as grades, tracked classrooms and modified curricula, and labels like “the good student” or “the slow learner” (Bartlett, 2007, p. 217).

To conclude this section, after engaging with the literacies of college for one semester, all of the participants became very critical of their academic preparation they received in high school. All of the students pointed out the easiness of high school assignments and their teachers’ leniency towards deadlines as detrimental to their academic preparedness. Furthermore, all of the participants felt that the only on-level English class that prepared them for college writing was their senior-year class. Some of the students specifically mentioned that if it were not for the research paper they had to do in their senior year, they would not know how to develop a college paper. For all these reasons, all of the participants felt that high school teachers held low expectations for them. The relationship between teachers’ low expectations, particularly towards minoritized students, and self-fulfilling prophecy has been examined.

Sorhagen (2013) conducted a longitudinal study to examine whether teachers' expectations for their first-grader students impacted long-term academic achievement. This study drew on data on the academic performance of 1,273 U.S. students since their first grade until high school. Her findings supported the self-fulfillment theory – high school students whose first-grade teachers underestimated their abilities performed remarkably worse on standardized tests of math, reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge and verbal reasoning. On the other hand, high school students whose first-grade teachers overestimated their abilities performed better than expected. This study also found significant interactions between students' SES and teachers' misperceptions of students' math and language skills. Specifically, teachers tended to underestimate the abilities of students from low income families.

Having examined students' perceptions of their academic preparedness, the following section presents students' reflections on their academic trajectories from high school to college. The section also examines each student's identity constructions across the spaces of high school and college taking into account in and out-of-school factors that seemed to impact, either positively or negatively, their persistence in college.

Academic Trajectories and Identities

This section looks at each student's literacies and identity constructions across spaces – high school and college – and across time. One of the main sources of data for this section was the last interview with individual students. In those interviews, students' reflections on their identity constructions were prompted by photographs that the participants themselves took in the spaces of high school and college. Specifically, the students were asked the following questions: How do these pictures reflect “who you are”/ your identity in the space of college? Looking at these two pictures [in high school and college], tell me about how you have changed or not

changed from high school to college. Students' answers to these questions not only pointed to their identities constructions across spaces but also highlighted outside factors that impacted their education as well as sources of support to persist in college.

Ana

I have come to realize more like, like. Hum, more hum what is the word? Hum, like more independent. I don't wanna rely on people. I wanna do by myself. Like maybe I used to rely so much on my teachers, like for them to do everything. And now I realize "Oh, I had it so easy back then." And now I have to actually try to earn something that I want (Ana, Interview, 02/12/2015).

In our last interview, Ana and I talked about the photograph she most identified with in the space of college – a round table outside the school library. Ana explained that that was the place where she and her boyfriend, one of her main sources of support throughout college, usually ate their lunch and prepared for their classes by looking at course syllabi and highlighting upcoming deadlines for assignments. Ana made an interesting observation about the photograph she took. She noted, “[In college] it is what I want to do, not what other people want me to do, maybe. Like in high school you have a gate and right here [in college] you are free.” (Ana, Interview, 02/12/2015). As all other participants, Ana noticed that the structure of college is more “free” in comparison to high school, that meaning in college students are expected to be independent and they have more flexibility to make their own choices; however, they must know how to deal with the consequences of their choices. Thus, for Ana, her first semester of college taught her the need to be more independent and self-motivated in order to succeed in this new cultural world. Factors outside of the academic sphere also helped Ana become more independent. As the young Latina explained, family issues led her to consider dropping out of

college and work more for financial independence so that she could move out from her grandmother's house, rent her own place, and possibly gain custody of her two little brothers who were living with her aunt.

Although those family dimensions made Ana's first semester in college more difficult, when asked why she decided to persist in school, she answered, "Like my grandma was saying like for me not to quit school. Like that I am doing so good, so why would I stop going to school?" Ana's answer highlights the positive effect of family in Latino/a students' college persistence (Delgado-Gaitan, 2013; Ong et al., 2006). As the literature on Latino/a first-generation college students shows, young Latino/as often feel the burden of family responsibilities; however, at the same time, they also find in family members the motivation and support to persist in their postsecondary studies (Delgado-Gaitan, 2013; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Ana then decided to focus on her long-term goal – to obtain a college degree, as she realized it is was a safer venue for financial stability. Additionally, as Ana's grandmother pointed out, Ana was doing well in college in the same way she did in high school. Ana passed all her classes with A's, except for history. Ana struggled with figuring out the literacies of history and almost failed the class. Because of Ana's successful academic trajectory in high school and in her other college classes, it was difficult for her to be positioned as a "struggling" student her history class, therefore she considered dropping the class but her boyfriend motivated her to continue. Perhaps Ana's challenges with the literacies of history served to reinforce the lesson she learned in her first semester of college – the need to become independent by figuring out how to navigate disciplinary literacy practices and meet professors' expectations.

Cecilia

In college, you can't slack. You must manage your time. It is not always about just going out and stuff. It is about like actually learning and doing your work (Cecilia, Interview, 02/10/2015).

In our last interview, Cecilia reflected on the photograph she took of the CC computer lab. She explained why she identified with that specific space, “I was always in there doing my work cause I didn’t have a computer at home, so I was always going to the lab and looking at my homework” (Cecilia, Interview, 02/10/2015). Reflecting on her trajectory from high school to college, Cecilia made comparisons between the photograph she took in high school, at the cafeteria, and the photograph she took of the computer lab in college. In doing so, she pointed out identity shifts in her personality across those spaces:

I think I am a different person. I was just more outgoing, more crazy. Like
I mean I still am but now here is like you have to be quiet or people will
look at you, you know what I mean? I had more fun there in the cafeteria
(Cecilia, Interview, 02/10/2015).

The excerpt above suggests that, during high school, Cecilia’s identity was very much tied to collective practices such as “hanging out” with friends and participating in clubs, as she told me. In the “quiet” space of college, however, Cecilia was often on her own, more focused on different types of activities like doing her homework in the computer lab. Throughout her first semester of college, Cecilia seemed to have difficulties negotiating her sociable personality and college life. When asked about the lessons learned in her first semester of college, Cecilia answered, “In college, you can’t slack. You must manage your time. It is not always about just going out and stuff. It is about like actually learning and doing your work (Cecilia, Interview,

02/10/2015). Thus, time management, class attendance and assignment completion were some of the challenges Cecilia faced, partially, for choosing to “hang out” with friends over studying. It is important to highlight that socializing with friends was not the only factor interfering with the student’s academic performance. Cecilia, like many first-generation, low income, college students, reached a point where prioritizing her studies was not a simple matter of choice. In order to financially help her family, the student had to start working full-time. As noted in the previous chapter, Cecilia’s father had passed when she was 5 years old and her family – her mother and three sisters – received financial assistance from the government. Full-time employment started to affect Cecilia’s time management, class attendance, and assignment completion to an extent where the student had to drop one of her favorite course – English Composition.

As for her history class, Cecilia, like Ana, was positioned as a “struggling” student for not understanding her professor’s expectations. Nonetheless, while Ana made an effort to acquire those practices and reposition herself, Cecilia, decided to drop the class. When I asked Cecilia why she dropped history, she claimed that there was too much information in the class. Cecilia, like Ana and Nadia who had the same history instructor at CC, also complained about the history study guides which did not reflect the test content. The fact that these three students complained about the same issue may point to inadequate academic preparedness during high school. Perhaps because of teach-to-test approaches during high school, these students were not well prepared to apply their critical thinking so as to make sense of the material covered in their history class.

In sum, Cecilia’s academic trajectory during her first semester of college was deeply impacted by out-of-school factors. Besides having to dedicate more hours to working, Cecilia,

like Ana and many other Latino/a students, had to attend to other family responsibilities such as helping her siblings with homework and pick them up from school. Despite feeling constrained by these responsibilities, the student found in her family a source of support to persist in college. When I asked Cecilia to specify who had been her major source of support during her first semester in college, the student answered:

I think all my family cause I am the first one that went to college so everyone is like oh. I am kind of like an example to my sisters, you know, like “*Aprenda con tu hermana*” – you know like learn from your sister. So that’s what they would say. So that would make me happy and stuff (Cecilia, Interview, 02/10/2015).

The excerpt above suggests Cecilia’s pride in being the first in her family to go to college. Thus, even though Cecilia had a bumpy first semester in college, she told me that dropping out had never been an option for her as she was seen as an example for her siblings. At that point in her postsecondary studies, Cecilia described herself as a “confused college student” because she had not decided her major; nonetheless she seemed very sure about continuing to pursue a college degree.

Juan

During the summer I kept thinking to myself, “Wow I am so ready for college, nothing is going to go wrong and I am going to nail this”. This was my way of thinking the whole summer, not taking into consideration that well, THIS IS COLLEGE! I could not keep goofing off and still pass my classes just like in high school. I, of course, never realized this until a couple of weeks after college started (Excerpt from Juan’s essay for his English Composition class, 11/04/2014).

Among all of the participants, Juan seemed to have the hardest transition to college as he did not seem to identify with this cultural world. Juan's "goofy" personality, as his high school English teacher described him, did not fit into the quiet and serious space of college. Furthermore, Juan struggled with managing his time between friends and academic responsibilities. The student then seemed to resist college practices by carrying on the same behaviors or "ways of being" that characterized him as a high school student. Like in high school, Juan missed deadlines for his college assignments, spent a great amount of time just "hanging out" with friends, sat in the back of the class while talking loud and laughing, and fell asleep during some of the lectures. Juan's resistance to some aspects of the academic discourses almost led him to fail his English and math classes; however, he managed to pass them with a C.

In our last interview, during his second semester of college, Juan seemed more focused on school and he ascribed that to two main factors: time management and identification with some of the classes he was taking. Juan was better able to manage his time after getting a part time job at *Pizza hut*. According to Juan, he had a hard time handling "too much free time" during his first semester of college. Additionally, he told me that changing his major from business to Automotive Technology, a two-year degree offered at CC, helped him to focus on his studies. When I asked Juan which place he most identified with in the space of college, the student happily showed me the picture of the car shop where his automotive class took place. Juan explained:

I took this picture because I am there four times a week for school and the teacher lets you bring in your car if you want to work on it. So I take my mustang and do little tweaks and notches on it and I leave [...] I guess, since I didn't have any classes towards my career [last semester], it felt like high school again. But this semester I have my basics

and this and that but I also have my labs and classes that have to do with my career. So I guess it brings more excitement into your education, more willingness to do it (Juan, interview, 02/11/2015).

As the excerpt shows, Juan felt motivated to keep on pursuing a degree as he found a purpose for the literacy practices he was required to engage with – even though he was still taking his “basics”, the reading and writing as well as hands-on activities related to his automotive class started to shape a new figure world where Juan envisioned himself in, and therefore thought it was worth investing his time and effort to master the practices of this cultural world. Juan then told me about his new plans of obtaining his associate’s degree in technology automotive, opening his car own shop, and saving money to go back to college in order to pursue a business degree. In conclusion, the automotive class seems to have opened up a new figured world where Juan repositioned himself from resistant and “lazy”, as he put described himself during our first and second interviews, to “hardworking”, as he defined himself in our last interview.

Julie

I am student who wants to graduate; wants to get a career; wants to continue. Well, now that I am pregnant I wanna continue with my child. I don't wanna drop out of college. I wanna keep going. [...] I always wanted to get a career, get a better future. I guess, get my own house later on in life. The goals – get a better car or something, you know. I wanna provide something for myself and my family, you know (Julie, interview, 02/10/2015).

During the interviews and informal conversations with Julie, the student often referred to college as a totally different world from high school; however, in our last interview, when Julie

compared the photographs taken in high school and college, she concluded that, “it doesn’t change anything... because they [the photographs] are both in the computer lab. I was doing homework there. I am doing homework here, you know” (02/10/2015). Even though Julie’s perspectives on high school versus college might seem contradictory, in reality they are not – those two figured worlds were very different in terms of rules and norms but Julie’s determination to navigate academic discourses in those two spaces remained the same; an evidence of that was the amount of time she spent at SHS’s and BU’s computer labs to complete her homework.

During the fall 2014 semester, I witnessed Julie’s great effort to succeed in her classes as we often worked together in one of BU’s computer lab where the student, most of the time, did her EC assignments. Even though Julie reported struggling with reading and writing since elementary school, she told me that English was her favorite class. During her first semester in college, Julie showed determination in her classes. For English Composition, the students got 89 as a final grade. Julie also managed to pass her other classes with A’s and B’s except for psychology, a class that she actually failed.

Despite Julie’s determination to obtain a college degree and eventually have a career, many structural factors limited her chances for self-authoring in the figured world of college. To start with, Julie’s family dimension was complex – her father had been deported to Mexico for involvement in illegal activities in the U.S.; her mother, a high school dropout, lived in another state where she found a job opportunity as a caretaker; and her older sister almost dropped out of high school because of an unplanned pregnancy. Living with her grandparents for most part of her life, Julie strived for a better life than her family members had. Even though Julie’s grandparents showed their support for her educational goals by taking over taking over the

household chores, for example, not having her parents around was a heavy burden for the young student. Julie's family dimensions demanded that she grow up fast, making important decisions on her own. In the excerpt below, Julie described how she made up her mind regarding going to college:

And then that's when you just told me like "You should go to college. You should do this." And I was like '*Pues esta*. Now I got inspired to do something, you know.'" Like I didn't want to end up like my sister. Like right now she is struggling. She is like regretting not going to college. I don't wanna become her. Then my mom tells me like "You did a good thing on going to college" (02/10/2015).

In this excerpt, Julie described one of our interactions during high school in which she felt inspired to go to college. Even though college was a completely unknown path, Julie decided to take it as she thought this was a way out of the struggles her family members were facing. Julie then courageously decided to attend college; however, her first semester at BU was definitely impacted by her 40 hours a week night shifts at Walmart. Furthermore, by the end of her first semester in college other life-changing events affected Julie's academic trajectory: she got pregnant and decided to move in with her boyfriend and his family. In our last interview, Julie regretted having moved in with her boyfriend because he was still in high school and did not have a job. Facing difficult financial struggles, Julie found it hard to concentrate on her studies and eventually dropped out of college during her second semester. Julie's story is a clear example of how structural factors may greatly constrain one's educational and career goals. Even though the young student had repeatedly told me that she did not want to be like her sister who did not attend college and got pregnant at a very young age, socioeconomic factors played a major role in shaping Julie's life in the same way as her sister's.

Nadia

Before I was like “Oh, I am gonna go to college.” But when you are in college, you get to see how it feels and, you know. It is way different from high school. I feel like you get to see that. You become more independent because no one is gonna do it for you (Nadia, interview, 12/09/2014).

In our second interview, Nadia described herself as independent and explained that she had learned the importance of being independent from two great women in her family – her mother and grandmother. Thus, since a very young age, Nadia knew that it was up to her to work hard in order to achieve her dream of becoming rich not only to provide a comfortable life to her family but also to help people in need. For Nadia, higher education was the path to achieve her “really big dreams”, as she put it. The student told me about how her participation in this study inspired her to possibly pursue a doctoral degree in the future. She said:

I wanna go all the way up to Doctorates. If it is possible. I just want to go as far as I can. How awesome it would be like “Oh, I have a doctorate in business.” You know, I feel like that just sounds awesome. And I guess I saw you like that and I was like “I wanna do it, too.” Cause I don’t know a lot of people who have doctorate; just probably you (Interview, 12/09/2014).

Nadia’s excerpt reinforces the importance of role models, a theme that emerged in chapter 4. As data showed, the participants’ families expected them to become role models for their siblings by pursuing further education; however, fulfilling their parents’ expectations was difficult when the participants’ themselves did not have role models associated to higher education in their families. In addition to role models, Nadia’s excerpt highlights the theme of college as a means to become independent. Even though the young student had always been

independent in many aspects of her life, she thought that her first semester in college was an experience that reinforced the importance of being independent. She realized that, differently from high school, college students often had to figure out things on their own as well as develop self-monitoring abilities so as to succeed in their classes. In her history class, for example, Nadia struggled with understanding her professor's expectations for exams as she was very used to high school practices in which teachers made it very clear what to study for a test. In her math class, on the other hand, Nadia faced challenges due to procrastination. In our last interview, she brought a photograph of the math tutoring center and explained that she identified with that space because of the amount of time she spent there in order to catch up with her math class. With the help from CC math tutors and her classmate, Ana, Nadia passed math, her most challenging class.

Natalia

Before [in high school] it was mostly always trying to be with friends; trying to have fun.

Now it is like studying, getting my stuff right (Natalia, interview, 02/09/2015).

Among all the participants in this study, Natalia seemed to have had the easiest transition to college. During my participant observations in Southwest High School, Natalia sometimes struck me as a disengaged student. In our first interview, the student told me that she started getting lazy in school around her sophomore year; however, she did not know why that happened. As I got to know Natalia better, I realized that her apparent disengagement or “laziness” in high school may have to do with her being mature for her age. In fact, in our first interview she told me, “I am tired of high school... I guess people are immature” (Interview, 05/07/2014). As for her disengagement from some of the literacy practices of her high school English class, this seemed to be linked to the pedagogic methods used by the teachers. As seen in

chapters 4 and 5, Natalia, an avid fiction reader outside of school context, reported feeling “bored” during the in-class silent reading of *Frankenstein*. The student told me that she would rather have read it on her own out of class time.

Since high school Natalia showed self-motivation to go to college and was strongly oriented towards the goal of pursuing a business degree in order to open her own business. Throughout her first semester at BU, the young Latina continued to demonstrate her self-motivation by drawing on different resources to navigate her classes. She often sought for my help to brainstorm ideas for her Business class paper and also requested my help to revise her drafts. Additionally, Natalia made appointments with her professors whenever she needed clarification regarding assignments.

Besides Natalia’s clear efforts to acquire the discourses of higher education, she also adopted practices that were conducive to academic success. She told me that she learned “how to say ‘no’ to friends and family” when it was necessary to focus on her studies. Natalia still kept in touch with her high school friends but always prioritized school. She said:

I see them [her high school friends] once in a while. We are still friends and everything. It is just that I decided to pay attention to my studies ‘cause I actually wanna do something. And that’s what I like about my friends because they are not those negative people that are like “Oh, let’s go do this; do bad stuff.” They are like “Oh, we are studying and stuff.” So we are all going through the same thing. So that’s what I like. Like they understand” (Interview, 05/07/2014).

Natalia’s quote highlights practices that helped her to stay focused on her goals – her studies were in first place and her friends were positive people who were also pursuing a college

degree, therefore they understood her well. Natalia cultivated her friendships outside college but found it hard to make friends on campus because of her shy personality. In our second interview, the student told me that she wanted to have friends but, at the same time, was afraid that friendships on campus could distract her from school. Thus, during her first semester, Natalia mostly spent time on her own in BU's Technology Center, located in the library. She took a photograph of the Technology Center to our last interview and explained that that was the college space she most identified with, as she spent so much time there doing her homework. It seems that Natalia's effort to acquire the discourses of the university were worthwhile because she was able to pass most of her classes with A's, except for history where she got a B as a final grade.

Nina

I think [in high school] I was like a problem-free person, like no stress, no nothing. Like just went to school to have fun, to see my friends. I mean, to do work too but it was so easy. I was just a different person, I think. Like I am happy now but. I don't know - a different kind of happy (Nina, interview, 02/13/2015).

In our last interview, Nina reflected on her identity development by comparing the photographs she had taken in high school and in college. In the high school, Nina mostly identified with the gymnasium, a space where she spent a great amount of time training volleyball with friends who were like family to her. Nina, as the excerpt above shows, described herself as a "problem-free" high school student who "went to school to have fun, to see friends." Even though Nina graduated among the top 10% students in her high school, she told me that she never had to study hard or even prepare for tests because "things always came easy" to her. In the space of college, identity shifts seemed to have occurred as Nina realized that she felt the

need to study out of class time but had not yet developed the habit of doing so. The student's inefficient study habits particularly affected her performance in math, a subject that she found increasingly difficult at the college level.

Another factor that impacted Nina's engagement with math literacies was her initial difficulty in communicating with math tutors at the university. As previously described in this chapter, in her first visit to the math tutoring center, Nina left without actually meeting with the tutor because she feared that he would see her as "not smart." Nina's hesitation to communicate with the tutor may suggest that she had difficulty negotiating identities in her transition to college. Perhaps Nina, a very successful high school student, felt that an interaction with the tutor would automatically position her as a "struggling" student in her college-level math class. Later on during her first semester in college, Nina seemed to have changed her mindset – rather than viewing the tutors as mediators of her identity construction as "struggling" student, she started seeing them as resources to reposition herself in a class that she was almost failing. In addition to tutoring, Nina identified her boyfriend, also a BU student, as a major source of help for repositioning herself in her math class. In our last interview, Nina brought a photograph taken at the BU's cafeteria and explained that the significance of that space for her. It was in the cafeteria where she and her boyfriend would spend time talking and sometimes studying math. By drawing on tutors and her boyfriend as resources, Nina was able to pass her math class with a C. She passed her other classes with A's and B's.

Summary

One of the questions this chapter sought to answer was: How are participants' identities shaped through engagement with academic discourses? As previously explained, the figured world of college was comprised by more general discourses or practices that cut across

disciplines (Gee, 2012; Hungerford-Kresser, 2008; Zamel, 1998). Some of those academic practices included time management, study strategies, and communication with professors and peers (Conley, 2007). Disciplinary discourses, however, referred to the literacy practices within the disciplines. As the chapter showed, many of the students faced some type of conflict while developing identities as college students through the discourses of higher education. In other words, all of the students had some sort of difficulty in negotiating who they were and who they were expected to become in order to succeed in the figured world of college. While some of the students made clear efforts to acquire the practices associated to the model of “good student” in college, others resisted some of those practices (Wortham, 2004). The students’ struggle to acquire postsecondary literacies as well as their resistance to them show that literacy implies much more than a set of skills. Because of its contextual nature, literacy always involves a complex struggle for power (Gee, 2012; Street, 2003).

The struggle for power in negotiating literacies and identities was central to Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez’s (2012) discussion on Latino/a students’ transitions to a predominantly White, upper middle class university. Even though the Latino/as in their study had been outstanding high school students and seemed to have mastered the literacy practices that are typically associated to college readiness, they still faced challenges negotiating literacies and identities due to contextual issues such as race and class, which affected daily interactions their White, upper-middle class peers. The struggle to negotiate identities seemed to have led three out of the five study participants to drop out of college after their first year in the university. For Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez (2012), these findings point to the need to reconceptualize college readiness so as to consider factors that go beyond transferrable sets of skills. As other researchers have highlighted, not all students who are academically prepared are

“college-ready” (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Barnes, et al., 2010; Chandler, et al., 2014). College readiness seems to be a more holistic term that encompasses other complex dimensions of academic success such as students’ adaptations to the culture of the university, which varies across institutions, and structural forces that pose challenges, especially to low-income first-generation college students.

The second half of this chapter sought to answer the following question: How do students make sense of their literacies and identity development after their first semester in college? To answer this question I examined students’ perceptions of their college preparedness and also explored their individual trajectories in order to better understand in and out-of-school factors that possibly influenced their development as college students. Data analysis showed that all the students felt that high school did not prepare them for college because, as some of the participants argued, high school teachers were concerned about their students passing standardized tests. This finding also emerged in Ruecker’s (2012) study on borderland youth’s transitions to college. Additionally, other researchers have highlighted how standardized testing has served a “one-size-fits-all” college readiness agenda that not only stifles creative thinking, a critical aspect of college success, but also works against underrepresented students who are more likely to “fail” high-stakes testing due to the unequal access to economic resources and qualified human capital across school districts (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Barnes, et al., 2010; Chandler, et al., 2014). Regarding academic writing, all of the participants agreed that the only on-level English class that prepared them for college-level writing was their senior English class just for the fact that they were taught how to develop a research paper. Some of the students stressed that AP classes highly differed from on-level classes in terms of quality of instruction and teachers’ expectations for assignments. The interaction between these academic preparation factors and

particular events in the participants' lives outside school shaped, in unique ways, their process of becoming college students.

Chapter 7: Findings and Implications for Research, Theory, Policy, and Practice

Introduction

This study examined Latino/a students' transitions from high school to college. From a sociocultural perspective on literacies and identities, I examined how students' literacy practices shaped their identities and vice-versa in a holistic way which took into consideration the reading and writing they engaged with outside of school as well as across educational institutions – high school and college. I used the Figured Worlds theory to look at out-of-school spaces and educational institutions as cultural worlds where literacies and identities are mutually constructed through the mediation of material and symbolic artifacts. Examples of material artifacts that mediated these constructions were print-based as well as digital-technology-based reading and writing. As for symbolic artifacts, some examples were competing discourses and practices that, in the space of home and Southwest High School, seemed to foster and sometimes constrain participants' aspirations for identities as college students. The analysis of participants' pre-college literacies were important for an understanding of their identity (re)-constructions during their first semester of college. This final chapter presents a discussion on the main findings of this study. Following the presentation of the findings, I discuss the implications for research, theory, policy, and practice.

Findings

Students' Limited Chances to Draw on their Multilingual Repertoire of Practices as Resources to Support the Learning of Academic Literacies

One of the main findings of this study related to how students negotiated literacies and identities across in and out-of-school spaces through the mediation of material artifacts such as books, magazines, diaries, cell phones, and computers. Chapter 4 was an attempt to capture how participants' self-constructions through engagement with out-of-school literacies, also known as "informal" and "everyday" literacies (Christenbury et al., 2009). Findings revealed that the participants actively engaged with various literacy practices in English, Spanish, and "Spanglish," both print-based and also mediated through digital technologies. Examples of the multilingual literacy practices described in chapter 4 involved the reading of fiction and nonfiction books in both English and Spanish, the writing of diaries in English, Spanish, and "Spanglish," the use of social media for communicating with family and friends across the U.S.-Mexico border, participation in online discussion forums about cars in English and Spanish and the reading of articles on this subject in both languages, and the use of translanguaging in religious literacy events where the reading of the bible occurred in Spanish but the writing and discussion on the text were done in both English and Spanish. These findings were important because these literacy practices reflected personal interests and beliefs that were key aspects of participants' identities. In addition to that, participants' active engagement with literacy practices they identified with helped to deconstruct frameworks that have monolithically portrayed adolescents as wild and troubled (Moje, 2002), irrational, deviant and apathetic (Wortham, 2011; Bartlett et al., 2011).

Finally, contradicting the myth that adolescent literacy always involves digital technology, findings revealed that the Latino/a youth in this study valued and engaged with both “new” and “old” literacies (Gee, 2012). The reading of fiction and nonfiction books in English and in Spanish, for example, was always mediated by physical books even though some of the participants had computer and internet access from home. While Nadia used her multilingualism to frequently share her thoughts and feelings on social media, Ana and Natalia preferred not to do so as they saw social media as spaces where people are always pretending. Ana then preferred to express her feelings towards her boyfriend through handwritten letters in English, her boyfriend’s dominant language. Cecilia, like Ana, did not like the idea of sharing her thoughts and feeling on social media, therefore she kept a personal handwritten diary where she used her multilingualism as a tool to not only express her feelings but also her career goals. In a nutshell, the findings of out-of-school reading and writing showed that “literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in social goals and cultural practices” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 12).

While outside the high school sphere the participants positioned themselves as active consumers and producers of knowledge, readers and writers, these positionings or identities were stifled within the space of the high school. Chapter 5 showed that, as a powerful social institution (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), Southwest High School, like most educational institutions, was a hierarchically structured figured world that tended to privilege white, middle class discourses or “ways of being in the world” (Gee, 2012, p. 142). Even though power relations are always present in formal learning environments, they can be minimized when educators draw on students’ funds of knowledge as resources. In chapter 5, the issue of power relations, which is always embedded in literacy (Gee, 2012; Street, 2003) and intertwined with the production of identities (Barton et al, 2013), was analyzed through the description of two main class activities

that took place during my data collection at SHS: the reading of the British novel *Frankenstein* and the development of a mini-research paper. Data analysis showed that the pedagogies used by the English teachers to approach the classic British novel limited, to a great extent, students' possibilities of self-authoring. The reading of the chapters was entirely done in class and was always followed by the completion of worksheets based on specific chapters. In both Ms. Martinez's and Ms. Garcia's English classes, little to no scaffolding was provided to support students' comprehension of the novel. Even though both teachers were bilingual and there were ELLs in their classrooms, the teachers never used Spanish to support reading comprehension. Moreover, during the English classes, the students were rarely encouraged to express their views on social identity, marginalization, and loneliness – key themes from the novel. Later on during the interviews, I learned that, despite the inefficient pedagogical approaches to *Frankenstein*, all of the participants reported having enjoyed the reading of the novel, and were able to critically think about the themes social identity, marginalization, and loneliness, which some of the participants personally identified with. This finding corroborates the point that the pedagogical approaches to the reading of the novel constrained the students' possibilities of authoring themselves as active bilingual learners and critical thinkers.

In the interviews with the high school teachers, I found that the teachers themselves were dissatisfied with the fact that *Frankenstein* had to be read during class time because there were not enough copies of the books for the students to take home. Even though the lack of resources in the school was problematic, the teachers could have made the book reading more engaging provided that they had capitalized on students' funds of knowledge (i.e., their prior knowledge and experiences related to the key themes of the book; their bilingualism) as resources for learning (Velez-Ibanez, & Greenberg, 1989). This argument seemed plausible particularly when I

witnessed the students engaging with the preparation and writing of a mini-research paper, another major class activity during my data collection. For completion of the mini-research paper, which involved ongoing scaffolding, the students were encouraged to take charge of their own learning by using the library and online resources to conduct research on their topic of choice. Thus the pedagogical approaches used for the writing of the research paper were successful in the sense that they minimized the power relations embedded in the learning process by giving the students the agency to choose and research their topic of interest, help one another using the language(s) they wanted, and peer-review one another's drafts. Drawing on Gutierrez et al. (1999), the pedagogies around the research paper activity allowed for the creation of third spaces where students drew on their multiliterate and multilingual resources to expand learning. Even though the lack of material resources was still a problem as the students had to share computers to work on their papers, the creation of third spaces where students' resources were valued seemed highly beneficial for the participants in this study as well as for the students classified as ELLs in those English classes.

To conclude, this section showed that the literacy practices the students engaged with were purposeful and contextual; therefore, they required constant negotiations of identities. For example, when engaging with everyday literacies, the participants negotiated what types of reading and writing they personally thought that should be mediated by technology and which ones seemed more appropriate in traditional paper-based style. While out-of-school literacies presented innumerable chances for self-authoring, those chances were constrained in the space of high school where the academic discourse was, often times, restricted to page-bound, Standard English reading and writing practices.

Crafting Identities between High and Low Expectations: The Mismatch between the Discourses and Practices of Home and School

Another main finding relates to how participants' aspirations for identities as college students were developed through discourses (symbolic artifacts) and practices in the spaces of home and Southwest High School. Deconstructing ideologies that Mexican families do not value education (Valencia, 2002), all participants, during the interviews, described how their parents, siblings, and/or grandparents were proud of them for being the first in their families to go to college. In the interviews, the discourses around being the first in the family to attend college were tied to labels or positionings such as "good student" and "role model." In other words, all participants positioned themselves, and in some cases were positioned by family members, as role models and good students because they intended to pursue higher education. For some of the participants, their family's high expectations for their educational goals were explicitly conveyed in the form of *consejos* or nurturing advice (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Because the participants themselves did not have role models for higher education, the *consejos* conveyed by their parents were framed as "what not to do/ become." For example, in one of the interviews Cecilia described the conversations she had with her mother about her educational goals. She said, "She [her mom] would always be like '*No sea como yo.*' You know, like actually go farther, don't stay like me...I had to go to college. I mean, I wanted to go to college" (Cecilia, individual interview, 10/28/2014). This quote from Cecilia's interview not only provides evidence for the power of family members nurturing advice but also highlights the underlying tension of meeting family members' high expectations.

Even though all participants shared discourses of pride in becoming role models for their younger siblings and future generations, some of them feared not meeting their parents' high

expectations for their educational goals. This fear seems natural as the participants themselves did not have role models for higher education. Thus, the first-generation college students in this study, like many others across the country, felt supported by their family members in relation to their academic goals; however, family members often did not have the type of cultural capital or “college knowledge” (Barnes & Slate, 2013) to help their children to confidently enter and navigate higher education.

While in the space of home family members’ high expectations were often explicitly communicated to participants in the form of *consejos* and discourses on becoming role models, the practices and discourses in the space of SHS were not always conducive to a college-going culture. To illustrate this point, in chapter 5, I compared and contrasted Ms. Garcia’s and Ms. Martinez’s classes. In the individual interviews, both Ms. Martinez and Ms. Garcia expressed frustration with their students’ parents, who the teachers believed had “very low” (their words) expectations for their children. In contrast, the teachers argued that they had high expectations for their students. There was, however, evidence that did not support this argument. In Ms. Martinez’s case, I had the chance to witness her high expectations for her students by providing them with nurturing advice on college and career goals. The teacher’s caring attitude towards her students was also conveyed through the visuals on her classroom walls – graphic organizers, flags, ribbons, and pennants from different universities such as BU, Saint Louis University, and Notre Dame University. In contrast, Ms. Garcia’s classroom walls were almost empty and the teacher limited herself to talking to students about the class content. Ms. Garcia would often be sitting at her desk using the computer while her students worked on an assignment. When talking to them, the teacher used a directive tone as she seemed to have difficulty with class

management. The differences in Ms. Martinez's and Ms. Garcia's classes are examples of how expectations were explicitly and implicitly conveyed at SHS.

Low expectations were evidenced in the school curriculum and teaching approaches as well. As discussed in the previous section, some literacy practices, such as the reading of the British novel *Frankenstein* in class and the pedagogical approaches attached to it positioned students as passive learners. Rather than creating more opportunities for the students to critically think about and discuss the book chapters, the teachers highly encouraged the students to get the summaries of the chapters on *SparkNotes*. In general, the low expectations on the part of the teachers and staff at SHS were perceived by the students as well. Both in individual and focus groups, all the participants shared very negative views about the academic preparation they had in high school. For the participants, a major evidence of the low expectations from their high school teachers, in general, was their leniency with deadlines and lack of rigor when grading. Some of the students thought that their high school teachers simply "didn't care" because they already "expected bad" from the students (Focus group at CC, 09/19/2014). Some participants specifically mentioned that the only concern of their high school teachers was that the students passed the TAKS.

On the other hand, some participants who had been recommended by their high school teachers to take AP classes pointed out the differences between these classes and on-level classes. These participants suggested that high expectations in AP classes were evidenced in the rigor of the curriculum, which emphasized critical thinking and writing, and in the teachers' attitudes – according to the students, AP teachers were very strict with grading and deadlines. Participants' perceptions of expectations in AP versus on-level classes raise the question of whether it is fair or not to "track" or group students by ability. The practice of tracking is very

controversial as some scholars and practitioners argue that it means to segregate students, particularly excluding those who already are marginalized – lower income and ethnically minoritized students. An interpretation of tracking practices from the perspective of the figured worlds theory brings up the issue of labels - “AP student” vs. “on-level student”- as positionings that, over time, may be accepted as identities. Some participants in this study, for example, brought up some of the discourses surrounding those labels. For them, AP students were “fast” and “smart”, which implied that on-level students were “slow” and “not smart.”

In sum, participants’ identities were crafted between discourses and practices of high and low expectations across the spaces of home and school. At times, high expectations were conveyed explicitly both in the contexts of home and school. Other times, low expectations were embedded in the hidden curriculum of Southwest High School.

Becoming College Students: The Challenges of Acquiring Postsecondary-Level Academic Literacies

The finding I call “Becoming College Students: The Challenges of Acquiring Postsecondary-Level Academic Literacies” emerged through triangulation of various data sources across the spaces of high school and college. This finding relates to how participants negotiated literacies and identities in the process of becoming college students. Negotiation of identities is never a simple or linear process. As individuals participate in various figured worlds, they position themselves and are positioned in different ways, according to how they interact with the artifacts that mediate collective practices within those cultural worlds. Over time, certain identities “thicken” (Holland & Lave, 2001), particularly when one is positioned in the same way across contexts. Conversely, identities may also be destabilized depending on how

individuals interact with the artifacts of a given figured world and respond to the positionings that those interactions afford (Urrieta, 2007).

As shown in chapter 6, all of the participants faced, to different extents, challenges in negotiating identities in college not only because they had to familiarize themselves with the practices of this new cultural world, which greatly differed from high school, but also because they participated in other figured worlds (i.e., home and work) which also demanded their time and dedication. My discussion of the finding “becoming college students” will start with an analysis of participants’ identity constructions through the academic practices of higher education, in a more general sense, and later will address disciplinary literacies. Then, I will deepen this analysis by looking at the broader picture, that is, by taking into account how participation in other figured worlds influenced participants’ academic trajectories.

In the individual and focus groups interviews conducted with the participants right after they started college, many of them pointed to socialization into this new cultural world as a challenge. Because some of the participants had been classmates since elementary school, they complained about not having their friends around and feeling lonely at both higher education institutions, but especially at BU which was much larger. Even though this finding is not surprising, it must be addressed as it seemed to have an impact on students’ perception of college and identity constructions. In comparison to high school, the participants perceived college as a “serious” and “quiet” place where “you are on own” (their words). The participants then acknowledged the need to become more independent in college, meaning to not expect professors or classmates to remind them what needs to be done, manage time wisely, and keep up with tests and assignments, because they said that in contrast to high school, college professors do typically give second chances. The impersonal culture of college coupled with the

academic literacies that characterized this figured world (i.e. time management and study strategies) affected students in different ways - Cecilia and Juan felt that they could not be loud and talkative as they used to be; nonetheless, Juan resisted the “serious” and “quiet” college culture by sitting in the back of the class, talking loud, and sometimes sleeping during lectures. In his English Composition (EC) class, perhaps because the instructor had been his high school English teacher, Juan did not arrive on time and turned in assignments late. The other participants, despite complaining about the perceived quiet and serious college culture, made an effort to adapt to it.

Regarding disciplinary literacies, the participants positioned themselves and were positioned in different ways across classes. Surprisingly, even the students who were considered “successful” in high school were positioned as “struggling” students because of some disciplinary literacy practices. Nina and Ana, for example, graduated among the top 10% of their high school and were considered “college ready” according to their TSI test scores; however, they had difficulties in different classes. Nina struggled with her Pre-Calculus class at BU, and reported almost failing it because she was embarrassed to seek for help from tutors. It seems that the student saw the math tutor as the mediator of her identity as “struggling” student, therefore she resisted getting help. Fortunately, she changed her perspective and started seeing the math tutor as a resource for repositioning herself in her class. At CC, Ana as well as Nadia and Cecilia, who were also considered good students in high school, struggled with the literacies of history. Like all other participants enrolled in history classes at CC and BU, Ana, Nadia, and Cecilia had difficulty with the large amount of information and notetaking in history classes. They also found it hard to figure out their CC history professor’s expectations for exams. The students complained that the history study guides did not exactly reflect the content of the exams.

This argument may reinforce that participants had not been adequately prepared for college-level coursework. In the interview, the participants themselves claimed that rather than preparing them for college with challenging activities, high school teachers were concerned about students passing standardized tests.

Besides dealing with a large amount of information and notetaking, the students enrolled in history classes both at CC and BU also complained about instructional methods in these classes. Describing the lecture and power point class routine as “boring,” the students reported not seeing the purpose of studying history. It seems that the disciplinary pedagogies used by history instructors in both institutions positioned students as passive learners. Juan, for example, resisted this positioning by authoring himself as “disruptive” student in his history class as well as in other college classes, including English Composition. The students enrolled in psychology classes also complained about the large amount of information conveyed through power points and lectures and being assessed through multiple choice tests. In general, the students enrolled in history and psychology at both institutions reported doing better in the portions of exams that required more writing rather than in multiple choice tests. Julie reported not having learned anything in her psychology class which she ended up failing despite having tried to reposition herself by forming a small study group with two classmates.

Regarding English Composition, one of the classes that most required reading and writing, all of the students enrolled in this class, except for Juan, positioned themselves (and were positioned) as successful students. In fact, most of the participants enrolled in EC cited it as their favorite college class mainly because in this class the students had more chances to express themselves through different writing genres as well as through in-class interactions with peers. Even Natalia, who had reported not enjoying English and writing during high school, told me

that she liked her EC class at BU. In a reflection assignment (see excerpt in chapter 6), the student wrote that her EC class in college helped her to become a better writer. Natalia did very well in her EC class and in all her other classes. Her academic trajectory was curious because, even though the student seemed disengaged in high school and, during our first interview she described herself as a “lazy” student, Natalia had the easiest transition to college as compared to the other participants. The only challenge the participant reported during her first semester in college was difficulty with making friends; however, paradoxically, she pointed out the fact of not having friends in college as an advantage because it helped her to stay focused on her studies. Perhaps high school classes were not challenging enough so as to stimulate Natalia to author herself as an active/engaged learner.

Having discussed aspects of the college culture as well as disciplinary literacies that impacted participants’ identity constructions, I now turn to out-of-school factors that influenced the students’ academic trajectories during their first semester of college.

Out-of-School Factors Impacting Students’ First Semester of College

Out-of-school factors related to the figured worlds of home and work also impacted participants’ first semester in college. All of the participants, except for Natalia, pointed out time management as a major challenge in the process of adapting to college. Juan, Nadia, and Nina, who only started working at the very end of their first semester in college, found it hard to manage time even when they were not working. According to them, it was difficult to manage what looked like “too much free time”, thus they tended to procrastinate.

Ana, Cecilia and Julie, on the other hand, had to balance their time among college, work, and family responsibilities. At one point during their first semester in college, the three students had to work full-time to provide financial support to their families. Cecilia, besides working full-

time, was responsible for picking up her siblings from school. The student also found it difficult to balance time between her responsibilities and friends, therefore she had to drop two classes – EC and history. As for Ana, her family dimensions were complicated. Ana’s parents were divorced and she completely cut ties with her father after graduating from high school. As Ana’s mother lost custody of her little brother, Ana started to work full time and considered quitting college in order to save more money, marry her boyfriend and possibly get custody of her younger brother. Her grandmother, however, convinced her to continue college. Like Ana, Julie also had a complicated family history with her father being deported to Mexico and her mother working in another state. Thus, Julie had been raised by her grandparents. In addition to these family matters, Julie got pregnant by the end of her first semester in college, which led her to drop out during spring 2015.

Ana’s, Cecilia’s, and Julie’s stories exemplify some of the hurdles many first-generation college students deal with – the need to work more than 20 hours to provide financial contribution to their families, the need to balance college, job, and family responsibilities, which include caring for younger siblings (Delgado-Gaitan, 2013; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Ruecker, 2012). These contextual factors reinforce the argument that being “college-ready” goes way beyond the mastering of the sets of skills being through standardized testing (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Barnes, et al., 2010; Chandler, et al., 2014). Even students who were considered “college-ready” based on standardized test scores such as the TAKS and the ACCUPLACER, a Texas Success Initiative assessment tool for college readiness, had some type of difficulty in their first semester of college. Thus, participants’ difficulties in navigating the literacies of college relate to academic preparation, which cannot be measured through standardized tests, and also to the complicated intersections between in and out-of-school factors.

The analysis of all participants' trajectories help us to understand the relevance of examining literacies in relation to identities. All of the students participated in different figured worlds that have shaped who they are and who they intend to become. Outside of their high school, as shown in chapter 4, the participants positioned themselves and were positioned as active readers and writers, and role models. Unfortunately, the figured world of high school not always drew on the students' funds of knowledge (Velez-Ibanez, & Greenberg, 1989) and future aspirations, which are important aspects of their identities, so as to support learning and academic goals. Besides the mismatch between teachers' and families' expectations for students' academic goals, lack of material resources within the high school and a teach-to-the test culture also seemed to have impacted the participants' academic preparedness. Despite the academic preparation issues, the participants in this study were able to enter higher education; however, unfortunately, not all of them persisted because of the intricacies of out-of-school factors shaping participants' identities and academic trajectories.

Implication of Findings

In the previous section I presented the three major findings that emerged from this study: (1) *Students' Limited Chances to Draw on their Multilingual Repertoire of Practices as Resources to Support the Learning of Academic Literacies*; (2) *Crafting Identities between High and Low Expectations: The Mismatch between the Discourses and Practices of Home and School*; (3) *Becoming College Students: The Challenges of Acquiring Postsecondary-Level Academic Literacies*; and (4) *Out-of-School Factors Impacting Students' First Semester of College*. In this section, I discuss the implications of these findings to research, theory, policy, and practice.

Research and Theory

In *Literacy inequalities in theory and practice: The power to name and define*, Street (2011) discusses how policymakers, nationally and internationally, have relied on the autonomous view of literacy to create programs and interventions to bridge “literacy gaps” in an attempt to promote social and economic growth. The scholar calls the autonomous model of literacy “ethnocentric” as it positions underrepresented groups as individuals who “lack” a supposedly universal and transferrable set of reading and writing skills grounded on hegemonic notions of what counts as knowledge. In the U.S. context, specifically, the autonomous model often steers curriculum and instructions towards assimilation of White, middle class language and culture. Opposing educational theory and practice that perpetuates “deficit” views of underrepresented groups, Street (2011) argues for a shift from “ethnocentric” to “ethnographic” approaches to literacy. As the scholar explains, because ethnography examines culture through situated social practices, this methodological research approach has the potential to challenge the simplistic view of literacy as a standardized set of skills.

In this study, the combination of ethnographic methods and sociocultural theories of literacies and identities, was key to exploring Latino/a students’ complex processes of identity constructions through literacy practices that varied across the spaces of educational institutions as well as out-of-school and online spaces. The analysis of participants’ literacies as situated practices shed light on how identity and power are always embedded in literacy. In the space of home, the students positioned themselves and were positioned as competent bilingual readers and writers, role-models for higher education, mentors, and tutors for their younger siblings. In the space of secondary and postsecondary institutions, however, identity constructions were sometimes limited because of the institutional power that tends to validate hegemonic literacies

and exclude other ways of knowing. Both in the space of high school and college there were examples of how students resisted “ethnocentric”/autonomous literacy practices that marginalized their identities.

Thus, the combination of ethnographic methods and a sociocultural framework allowed for a more complex understanding of literacies and identities, challenging deficit ideologies related to adolescents as well as Latino/a families. Regarding adolescents, the various sources of data on participants’ active and purposeful engagement with reading and writing contradicts theories that position adolescents as wild/troubled (Moje, 2002), irrational, deviant and apathetic (Wortham, 2011; Bartlett, et al., 2011). As for ideologies that stigmatize Latino/a families, chapter 4 presents numerous and strong examples to debunk the myth that these families do not value education. Interviews with the seven Latino/as along the course of this year-long study revealed that some of these youth even experienced pressure stemming from their families high expectations for their academic goals. I strongly believe that the use of ethnography was crucial for achieving those findings – by studying this group of first-generation college students’ literacies and identity constructions for an extended period of time, I was able to get a broad, and yet deeper understanding of the complexities of literacy and identity (re)-constructions within specific contexts. Additionally, examining this cultural groups’ practices across contexts added complexity to this study as data showed that the interplay of different figured worlds – home, school, work, and so on – may increase or limit one’s possibilities of authoring aspired identities.

This study’s findings also have implications for college readiness theory. College readiness frameworks like Conley’s (2007) have been used to guide research and policy at the secondary and postsecondary educational levels. As shown in chapter 6, Conley’s (2007) framework comprises both cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions identified as key for college

access and success. Those four dimensions are: *key cognitive strategies* and *content knowledge*, which relate to cognitive aspects of learning; and *academic behaviors* and *contextual skills and awareness*, which are considered non-cognitive dimensions of learning. Even though Conley's (2007) framework attempts to be more inclusive by acknowledging that college readiness goes beyond cognitive factors, its non-cognitive component is narrowly conceptualized.

In this study, all of the participants faced challenges related to non-cognitive aspects of college readiness – time management and study habits emerged as the most common issue during participants' first semester of college. Conley (2007) addresses those issues by claiming that college freshman students' struggle with time management and study habits are a consequence of their belief that college is not different from high school. This perception, explains Conley (2007), "leads them [freshman college students] to adopt work habits that quickly become problematic" (p. 23). Even though Conley (2007) is right about the issue of starting college with misguided expectations, the author does not take into account structural factors that lead freshman students to adopt "problematic" work habits.

As shown in chapter 6, three students had full-time jobs in their first-semester of college and this affected their time management and study habits. Nonetheless, they did not choose to do so. Instead, they had to do so in order to provide financial support to their families with whom they lived. These findings then point to the need for a more complex conceptualization of college readiness. This can be achieved by drawing on sociocultural theories that highlight the contextual aspects of college access and success, particularly among nontraditional students like the first-generation college students in this study. As research has shown, nontraditional students are becoming majority and postsecondary institutions are not prepared to serve these students (Ong

et al., 2006; Pathways to Success, 2012). Understanding college readiness in all its complexities is central to developing effective programs to improve college access and success.

Policy and Practice

One of the implications for policy, at the secondary level, is professional development for teachers so that all youth be equipped with the necessary tools for college and career readiness, which include higher critical thinking and writing ability (Conley, 2007; 2010; Roderick et al., 2009). Darling-Hammond and Nikole Richardson (2009) stress that “drive-by workshop models” (p.1) or teacher professional development are proven ineffective. In fact, in their literature review on teacher professional development, Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007) found that the most effective programs provided teachers with between 30 to 100 hours of learning opportunities along the course of 6 months to a year. The effectiveness of programs is also linked to a focus on active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection on one’s own practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) argue that the professional learning communities paradigm has shown very positive outcomes in the development of teachers’ classroom practices. In their words, “when whole grade levels, schools, or departments are involved, they create a critical mass for changed instruction at the school level. Teachers serve as support groups for one another in improving practice” (p.3). The authors stress, however, that it is important to that professional development programs assist teachers in learning communities in the process of aligning curriculum, assessment, and standards.

Helping teachers to align curriculum, assessment and standards in a way that critical thinking and creativity are at the center of learning is crucial. As this and other studies have shown (Barnes et al., 2010; Chandler et al. 2014; Ruecker, 2012), when standardized testing

becomes the main concern in schools, meaningful teaching and learning are compromised. In this study, some of the participants specifically stated that, rather than preparing them for college-level writing, their high school teachers' main concern was that they would pass the TAKS. In this sense, the high school teachers limited themselves to teaching the basic writing strategies and genres for the students to pass TAKS.

In 2012 the State of Texas replaced the TAKS with the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) program which “is a more rigorous testing program [that] emphasizes ‘readiness’ standards, which are the knowledge and skills that are considered most important for success in the grade or course subject that follows and for college and career” (Texas Education Agency, 2016). In order to graduate, high school students in Texas public schools must pass End of Course (EOC) exams in English I, English II, Algebra I, biology and U.S history. Students in grades 3-8 are also tested in different content areas including reading and math (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Recent research has shown that, like in TAKS era, literacy professionals still feel constrained by standardized testing within the STAAR program.

In their study with 12 elementary and middle school Literacy professionals, Davis's and Wilson's (2015) found that the participants felt pressured to meet standardized testing benchmarks, which in turn, greatly affected class instruction in way that students did not have as many opportunities for meaningful learning. Additionally, writing instruction continued to be limited to the training of students for the testing genre (Davis & Wilson, 2015). In this sense, in order to alleviate the impact of standardized testing on classroom instruction, it is important to invest in professional development practices that not only address specific content area educators' needs but also assist them in aligning curriculum and standards so that all students

benefit from meaningful classroom activities that reflect their teachers' high expectations for them.

At the postsecondary level, programs that provide first-generation college students with financial and emotional support are needed and, in case they already exist, faculty and staff must ensure that the students are aware of that. In this study all of the participants benefitted from the Federal Pell Grant, a need-based grant for undergraduate students. In addition to The Federal Pell Grant, Ana and Nina received scholarships for having graduated in the top 10 percent in high school. Julie also had an additional grant awarded provided by BU to undergraduate students whose yearly family income is less than \$30,000. Even though these sources of financial support were crucial for the participants in this study, they were not enough for some of them. Ana, Cecilia, and Julie, at some point of their first semester in college, had to work full time to provide financial assistance to their families. Pell Grants are helpful but have been significantly reduced after the 2008 recession (Reich & DeBot, 2015).

In addition to more sources of financial support, first-college generations students need advising and counseling services to help them to cope with academic and personal matters. Even though these services are already offered in two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions, the students may not know about them or may hesitate to seek for help. Julie, for example, was working full-time and having difficulties in her psychology class. Without proper advising and counseling, the student continued to struggle in the class and got an F grade which affected her GPA and eligibility for financial aid. Thus advising and counseling are also key to college success, and faculty can help to direct students to proper channels for assistance.

With regard to implications for practice, here I address both pre-college as well as college-level classroom practices. Scholars have highlighted the importance of improving

college access, particularly among ethnically minoritized students, by fostering a college-going culture (Delgado Gaitan, 2013; Kuh et al., 2006). This is accomplished when teachers and families communicate their high expectations towards students' academic goals through discourses and practices. In the space of home, the figured world of college was invoked through discourses and practices that positioned the participants as mentors and role models for their siblings. In the space of SHS, however, there were few opportunities for the students to author themselves as active learners who aspire for identities as college students. As shown in chapter 6, the participants perceived their high school teachers to have low expectations for them and they pointed out their English research paper as the only activity that prepared them for the academic literacies of college. For the research paper, the students were required to locate reliable sources of information, prepare outlines and drafts, peer-review each other's papers, write the paper, and finally present it to the class in "professional" manner, as described by the high school English teachers. Professionalism involved preparing a clear and synthesized power point presentation and also wearing more formally on the day of the presentation.

The research paper then was one of the few opportunities where the figured world of college was invoked in the high school. Within the figure worlds theory, the research paper activity can be interpreted as "play" that mimicked postsecondary literacy practices. As Holland et al. (1998) explain, play is central to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The authors argue that the activity of play "allows for the emergence of new figured worlds...that come eventually to reshape selves and lives in all seriousness" (Holland et al. 1998, p. 236). Thus, through engagement with the research paper activity, which is very common literacy practice in postsecondary settings, the students were enacting imagined identities as college students. Creating a college-going culture at SHS would require more opportunities for active engagement

with activities such as the research paper, which promoted the development of third spaces (Gutierrez et al., 1999). In those spaces, the students, as a community of learners, felt free to draw on their multilingual and multimodal repertoire of practices to acquire the Discourses (Gee, 2012), that is, ways of reading, writing, thinking and behaving, valued in higher education. In this regard, a start point to promoting a college-going culture and academic preparedness would be the support of third spaces. In addition to that, linguistic minoritized students would benefit from rigorous curriculum that provide them with plenty of opportunities to engage in writing tasks always followed by timely feedback and chances to revise and rewrite drafts (Duff, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011). Explicit instruction on the rules and conventions of language use is also necessary to help language minoritized students negotiate literacies and identities (Delpit, 1988; Canagarajah, 2011; Moje, 2007).

Besides rigorous curriculum for development of reading and writing competencies as well as student-centered approaches to learning, high school educators across content areas can better prepare their students for college-level literacies by teaching study strategies and notetaking techniques. These were academic literacies that participants in this study greatly struggled with. Finally, in addition to high expectations reflected in the practices and discourses in the space of school, a college-going culture must be supported by efficient dissemination of “college knowledge” (Conley, 2007). High school teachers and staff, preferably in collaboration with local colleges and university staff, could organize information sessions for the students and their families to learn information that is necessary for gaining admission and navigating higher education. For example, financial aid options and rules for eligibility, must be clarified so that families can make informed decisions.

Also, schools and community partnerships are inherent for first-year college students. As the literature on first-generation college students shows, Latino/a families are very interdependent (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). While familial interdependency provides first-year college students with emotional support (Delgado-Gaitan, 2013; Ong et al., 2006), it must be negotiated so that college-going Latino/as do not get overwhelmed by trying to handle academic, work, and family-related obligations at the same time. In other words, partnerships between schools and community must draw on familial interdependency, a characteristic of Latino/a families, as an asset for the students; however, parents need to be aware of the need to negotiate responsibilities in their household in order to facilitate their children's academic success. Schools must also ensure that families have access to all information needed for their children navigate the postsecondary system. During my data collection at SHS, only one "college knowledge" information session took place after regular school hours. Even though the English teachers reminded the students to bring their parents to the session, many parents may not have been available on that specific date and time. Furthermore, for the students to understand the importance of acquiring college knowledge, they must be often exposed to college talk where teachers encourage their students to pursue further education. In this study, Ms. Martinez did that a few times during her classes.

At the postsecondary level, this study's findings indicate the need for active learning within college classrooms. Many of the participants had difficulty engaging with the literacies of history and psychology at CC and BU. According to the students, the large amount of information in those classes was routinely conveyed through power points and oral lecture. The students described these instructional methods as "boring" and reported seen no purpose of studying history, for example. Because active learning in college classes has been linked to

college persistence (Bonwell, & Eison, 1991; Braxton et al., 2000; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh et al., 2006), it is paramount that professors balance their instructional methods by adding inquiry-based activities where students have the chance to think about what they are learning and interact among themselves. Inquiry-based activities involving interactions in small groups could be particularly beneficial for students who are entering higher education. As findings of this study showed, many of the participants perceived the culture of college to be isolating and individualistic. In this regard, classroom activities that promote active learning and interactions in small groups may help first-year students to develop a sense of belonging in higher education.

As for English Composition classes, CC course syllabi and instructional methods seemed to be more traditional as compared to BU. At the Borderland University, EC literacy practices were highly contextual and most often mediated by technology. For example, the teaching of genres was done through a step-by-step inquiry-based approach where the students identified a community problem and throughout the semester developed writing assignments such as a report of the community problem, an “opinion piece” regarding the identified community problem, and a “visual argument” which required the use of multimedia for an argumentation around the community issue. All these activities done by BU students in EC classes became part of their e-portfolios. Technology-mediated activities such as those encouraged at BU seem very relevant and needed in order to prepare the students for academic spheres which increasingly rely on technology for either hybrid or online classes. Additionally, computer literacies are important for preparing the students for the current job market. Another positive aspect of EC classes at BU was the writing of blogs where the students freely expressed their opinions about the classroom assignments and were also encouraged to reflect on their development as writers. Thus technology-mediated literacies are recommended in EC classes because not only they are a

means to prepare the students for more efficiently navigating college classes and job market, but also they serve as nonthreatening tool for self-expression and self-reflection.

Conclusion

This study examined seven Mexican-American students' literacies and identities constructions in their transitions from high school to college. Specifically, the literacies students engaged with outside and inside educational institutions were seen as semiotic mediators of identity (re)-constructions across spaces and time. Ethnography, as "essentially a relationship-building exercise" (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 100), was the lenses that enabled me to observe and interpret the complex processes of construction of selves through situated literacy practices which, at the same time, are product also produce the larger social structure. By linking local practices to the larger social context, I could better understand participants' motivations, limitations, and possibilities for self-authoring within figured worlds. Through the use of ethnography, I believe that I was able to accomplish the fundamental goal of this work - to provide a fair representation of participants' voices in their process of *becoming* college students. I hope that, through my writing, I was able to convey how literacy, as a thread weaving the students' participation in different figured worlds, mediated their crafting of multiliterate identities in the hope of constructing a better life for themselves and their families.

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Appendix A: First Individual Interview

Language History & Literacy Practices

1. Let's talk about your language history. Can you tell me about your first experiences learning English and Spanish?
2. Which language(s) do you feel more comfortable speaking nowadays?
3. Do you enjoy reading? If so, what types of material do you like reading?
4. What was the most interesting book you ever read? Did you read it for a class or for leisure?
5. Do you enjoy writing? If so, what type of material do you enjoy writing?
6. What language do you write more often in? Why?

Digital literacies

7. What types of digital technologies do you use on a daily basis? (i.e., phone, computer)
-For what purposes do you use these digital technologies? (i.e., texting, pictures, social media, etc.).
-Have you ever used digital technology for school purposes? Can you exemplify?

Literacy/Biliteracy in Academic Contexts (K-12)

7. Let's talk about your academic experiences in K-12. Were you in mainstream English or ESL (English as a Second Language) classes? Were you ever in a bilingual program?
8. What class has been the most helpful to your development as a writer?
9. Do you see yourself as a "good reader" in English? Why/ why not?
10. Do you think you are a "good writer" in English? Why/why not?
11. Do you consider yourself a "good student"? Why/Why not?
12. Do you think other people might see you as "a good student"? (i.e., parents; siblings; teachers)
13. Do you participate in any clubs at school? If so, can you tell me about them?
14. Can you tell me about any particularly positive experience with reading and/or writing in school? (middle school or high school).
15. Can you tell me about any negative experience with reading and/or writing in middle or high school?
16. Can you describe your experience transitioning from middle school to High school?

Academic Reading and Writing - Process and Strategies

17. How was the experience of reading the book *Frankenstein*? What did you like/not like about the book?

18. Which types of strategies do you use in order to understand difficult reading materials? (Ex.: dictionary, encyclopedia, google, etc).
19. Have you ever written a research paper before your senior year? How did you feel about the experience of writing the senior research paper?
20. How do you think the writing demands will be different in college? How do you think the reading demands will be different?
21. Do you feel that the writing instruction you've received here and in your previous schools has prepared you for college? Why/Why not?
22. Suppose that you are in college and you are required to write a research paper for your English class. What steps would take in order to prepare for the writing?
23. Can you think of ways in which the Spanish language helps you to write better in English? (ex.: writing outlines in Spanish; note-taking; using google translator).
24. What kind of feedback do you usually get on your writing? (i.e., Content-based; grammar-based).

Outside Influences and College Plans

25. Do you work? If so, where and how long have you worked there?
26. How do you manage to balance work and study?
27. In what subjects do you normally need more help with?
28. Do you receive any outside help with your homework tasks? Do you attend tutoring sessions? Get help from your parents or friends?
29. Can you think of any major life event that had a positive or negative impact on your education?
30. How do you feel about graduating from high school? How do you think your parents feel about that?
31. How did you decide to attend college?
 - What/who influenced your decision?
 - Are there other people who graduated from college in your family?
32. Have you thought about the major you would like to pursue? If so, which major and why? Where did you learn about this major, about what a (lawyer, for example) does?
33. What challenges do you think you will possibly face when you start college?
34. How do you plan to deal with such challenges?

Questions based on the pictures they took on the school campus

Why did you take these pictures?

How do these pictures reflect “who you are”/ your identity?

Appendix B: Second Individual Interview

College preparation and college admission

- 1- How have your impressions of CC/BU changed since you have been here? Is college what you expected it to be?
- 2- Did you take dual credit courses during high school? Which ones?
- 3- Did you take AP classes? Which ones? Did you get college credit?
- 4- Did you take SAT or ACT? How was it?
- 5- Who helped you with college application? Do you think that SHS staff was helpful?
- 6- How did you pick those classes? Did you have help from the advisor? Did you take the accuplacer test? (see who was placed in developmental and/or assigned a peer tutor)
- 7- Did you get financial aid? What about scholarships?

Reading and writing in college and study habits

- 9- What is your favorite class? Why?
- 10- Which class you don't like as much? Why?
- 11- Is there any class you find particularly challenging? What do you do to overcome these challenges?
- 12- Have you been able to keep up with your homework? Did you miss any deadline?
- 13- How is college reading compared to high school?
- 14- So far, was there any particularly difficult reading assigned in your classes? Why was it hard?
- 16- Can you give me examples of the types of writing you have done for each of your classes?
Which of these writing pieces you enjoyed doing? Why?
Which ones you did not enjoy? Why?
- 17- How is college writing compared to high school?
- 18- So far, how has your knowledge of academic English improved this semester? Have you learned any writing technique you considered helpful?
- 19- Has anyone helped you with your writing (instructors, peers, tutors)?

20. How is the feedback you have been getting from instructors on your writing? Is it positive/negative? Is it more content-based or grammar-based?

21- In which contexts do you use Spanish nowadays? (in/out of classroom? With professors? peers? Speaking? Writing?)

Instructional methods

22. How is college class instruction different (or not) from high school instruction?

23. What types of teaching methods you find most helpful in the classes you are currently taking?

24. What types of teaching methods you don't like in your classes?

25- How is your communications with your class instructors?

26. Which class do you find particularly challenging? Can you tell me more about this class?

27- Which of your classes most rely on the use of technology? Can you explain how? How do you feel about these classes?

Adaptation to college

28- So far, what has been your biggest challenges in adapting to college?

29- What have you done to overcome those challenges?

30- Have you met many of your high school friends here at CC/BU? Do you keep in touch with your high school friends at all?

31- Have you made new friends? If so, can you tell me about them? (i.e., how did you become friends? Which class(es) are you taking together? Do you study in groups? How do you help one another?)

Work, study, time management

32- Do you work? Where?

33- How do you manage your time (either working or not)?

Family

34- How many people are there in your family living with you?

35- Can you talk a little bit about them?

-Personality; cultural background; jobs

36- Which one of them do you most identify with? Why?

37- Can you tell me about ways your family has influenced your opinions about education?

Appendix C: Third Individual Interview

First semester of college – Facts and General Impressions

1- How would you describe this semester?

2-How did you do in your classes this semester?

Did you pass all your classes? If not, what happened?

3- What did you have to do for your finals in each of your classes? How did you prepare for your finals?

Academic English

4 - How has your academic English improved this semester?

5- Can you give me examples of the types of writing you had to do for each of your classes?

Which of these writing pieces you enjoyed doing? Why?

Which ones you did not enjoy? Why?

6- What was the hardest writing piece you produced this semester? What steps did you take in order to develop it?

7- Have you learned any writing technique you considered helpful?

8-Has anyone helped you with your writing (instructors, peers, tutors)?

9. Were most of your assignments submitted electronically or in hard copy?

10. How was the feedback you received from instructors on your writing?

Was it positive/negative?

Was it more content-based or grammar-based?

11. In general, do you pay attention to your instructors' feedback?

Do you pay attention to it when it is given electronically? /in hard copy?

Reflections on first semester of college

12. What was your biggest success in your first semester in college?

13- What would you have done differently this semester?

14. Do you feel you were prepared for what you had to do this semester? If not, where was it lacking?

15. What have been your most important sources of support this year?
- 16- Tell me about ways in which you felt supported by family members.
- 17 -Was there any occasion in which you felt your family or friends were not supportive of your educational goals?
- 18- Was there any occasion you did not feel supported by your class instructors or classmates?
- 19- Was there any major life event that negatively impacted your studies this semester? How did you manage that?
- 20- So far, what has been your biggest challenges in adapting to college?
- 21- What have you done to overcome those challenges?
- 22- Have you made new friends? If so, can you tell me about them? (i.e., how did you become friends? Which class(es) are you taking together? Do you study in groups? How do you help one another?)
23. How would you describe the difference between high school and college to seniors at SHS?
24. Think about the challenges you faced this semester. Now tell me, what advice would you give to students who will start school next year so that they do not go through the same challenges you faced?

Future directions

- 25- Do you plan to continue college next year? If so, have you registered? How did the registration process go?
- 26- What major would you like to pursue?
27. Do you have any concerns as you continue college? Is there anything that could possibly stand in the way of you graduating?

Self-perceptions: questions based on the pictures they took on the college campus

- 28- Why did you take these pictures?
- 29-How do these pictures reflect “who you are”/ your identity in the space of college?
- 30- [Show them the picture they took in high school and the one they took in college] Looking at these two pictures, tell me about how you have changed or not changed from high school to college.
- 31- How would you describe yourself to someone if you really wanted that person to understand who you are at this point in your life?

What has happened this school year that has made you this person?

32-Do you think your college professors see you as a good student? (ask about each of their professors and why they would see them as a good student or not).

33- How do your parents feel about you being in college for one semester already?

34- Do you think your parents see you as a good college student? What about your siblings?

Appendix D: Focus Group Interview

Experiences at SHS

(1) Let's talk about your academic experiences at Southwest High School

-What were the most **positive** aspects of studying at SHS?

-Were there any **negative** aspects of studying at SHS?

(2) Do you feel that SHS has prepared you for college?

-If so, in which subjects do you feel stronger?

-In which subjects you don't feel very confident in?

Transitioning from High School to College

(3) How did you decide to come to BU/CC?

-Did you ever consider going to XX, instead?

-Who helped you to make college decisions?

(4) What are your first impressions about college? How does it differ (or not) from high school?

(5) What challenges, if any, do you think you might come across in your first semester at CC/BU?

→TALK ABOUT NEXT STEPS:

- I will attend their college classes.

- I will need samples of their writing.

Appendix E: Interview with the High School English Teachers

Teachers' Background

1. Can you describe your educational/cultural background?
2. Can you talk about your teaching experience?
 - How long have you been teaching?
 - Where have you taught before you started working at Southwest High School?
3. Can you tell me about your experience teaching at Southwest High School? What has been good/not so good about teaching at SHS?
4. What are the challenges of teaching in a low income community on the U.S.-Mexico border?
5. Did you have many English Language Learners in your classes this year?
 - How do you feel about working with ELLs?
6. Are you bilingual?
 - Do you think that the fact that you are bilingual facilitates your teaching?
7. How was the process of shaping the senior English curriculum?
 - Who participated in the process of shaping the English curriculum?
 - How were materials (textbooks, books) and activities selected?
8. Reflecting on this academic year, which activities do you consider the most successful?
 - Is there any activity you would have done differently?

Writing Assignments

9. Can you tell me about the senior research paper? -Whose idea was that?
 - What were your main goals and expectations in relation to the research paper?
 - How did most of the students do in this paper? Did they do better in comparison to the Frankenstein paper?

10. What do you think are the strong points about the writing practice and instruction you provide your students with?

11. What kind of feedback do you usually give on students' writing? Is it usually grammar-based or content-based?

-Do you think students read your comments?

12. What do you know about the AP English classes offered in SHS? In what ways those classes are similar or different from regular English classes?

Technology-related Questions

13. How do you incorporate technology in your teaching?

-What are the goals of having students use computer technology in your class?

14. Do you feel that students have enough access to technology at Southwest High School?

15. Have you been provided with enough support and training to help your students use technology effectively?

Student Specific

16. How would you describe X's reading abilities? What about his/her writing abilities?

17. Does X need assistance mastering spoken and written academic English?

- What extra types of support has X received to improve his/her writing? (i.e., tutoring)

18. How would you describe X as a student?

19. How do you think X will do as a college student? Do you think that she/he might face challenges related to academic reading?

-What about academic writing /speaking?

20. In which aspects do you think X will do well in college?

Appendix F: Interview with English Composition Instructors

Teachers' Background

1. Can you describe your educational/cultural background?
2. Can you talk about your teaching experience?
3. Can you tell me about your experience teaching at BU/CC? What has been good/not so good about teaching at SHS?
4. What are the challenges of teaching in a low income community on the U.S.-Mexico border?
5. Did you have many English Language Learners in your classes this year?
 - How do you feel about working with ELLs?
6. How was the process of shaping the English Composition curriculum?
 - Who participated in the process of shaping the English curriculum?
 - How were materials (textbooks, books) and activities selected?
7. Reflecting on this semester, which activities do you consider the most successful?
 - Is there any activity you would have done differently?

Writing Assignments

8. What kind of feedback do you usually give on students' writing? Is it usually grammar-based or content-based?
 - Do you think students read your comments?

9. What do you know about the AP English classes offered in SHS? In what ways those classes are similar or different from regular English classes?

Technology-related Questions

10. How do you incorporate technology in your teaching?
11. Do you feel that students have enough access to technology at CC/BU?

12. Have you been provided with enough support and training to help your students use technology effectively?

Student Specific

13. How was X's performance in your class?

-Did X turn in all assignments?

-How was his/her participation in class? How as his/he attendance?

14. How would you describe X's writing abilities?

15. Does X need assistance mastering spoken and written academic English?

- What extra types of support has X received to improve his/her writing? (i.e. tutoring)

16. Was there any class presentation in which you were able to observe X's oral performance?
How was his/her use of academic English?

17. How would you describe X as a student?

18. How do you think X will continue doing as a college student?

-Do you think that she/he might face challenges related to academic reading/writing
/speaking?

Appendix G: Sample Analytic Memo

Date: February 7, 2014

Analytic Memo

In-Class Reading of Frankenstein

Since I started my data collection, the English classes have been centered on the reading of Frankenstein. As I keep on observing the school routine, some questions emerge. First: Why are they reading Frankenstein? Why is the reading done in class? I must find out who has a say in curriculum decisions. Students do not seem to connect with the book. Perhaps students' disengagement has to do with the fact that the book does not relate as much to their identities (the school is 95% Hispanic; they are teenagers). Also, the teachers do not make an effort to connect the book to students' lives/ the real world. The lack of effort to establish these connections on the part of teachers leads back to my previous question: why are students supposed to read the book in the classroom? In the very first day of observations, both teachers told me that "They read in the classroom because the students wouldn't read at home on their own." Are the students allowed to take the books to read at home? I have seen some of them taking it home, but they need to sign a sheet of paper. I wonder if all of them could do the same if they wanted to. Maybe they are just not encouraged to do so. Maybe the classes would be much more productive and engaging if students were reading the book at home and the classroom time was used just for critical talks, connections to real life, popular culture or whatever could help students enjoy the reading a little more.

Appendix H: Photographs Taken by the Participants

Ana

Accounting class at Southwest High School



Tables in front of CC Heritage Campus library

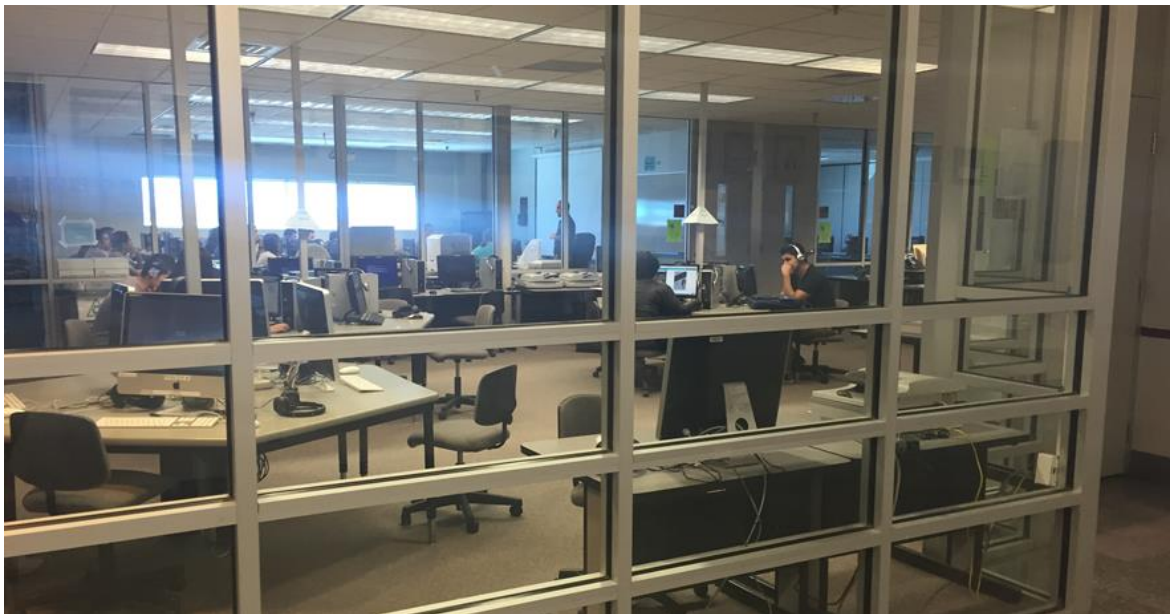


Cecilia

Southwest High School cafeteria



Computer lab at CC



Juan

Gymnasium at Southwest High School



Automotive class at CC

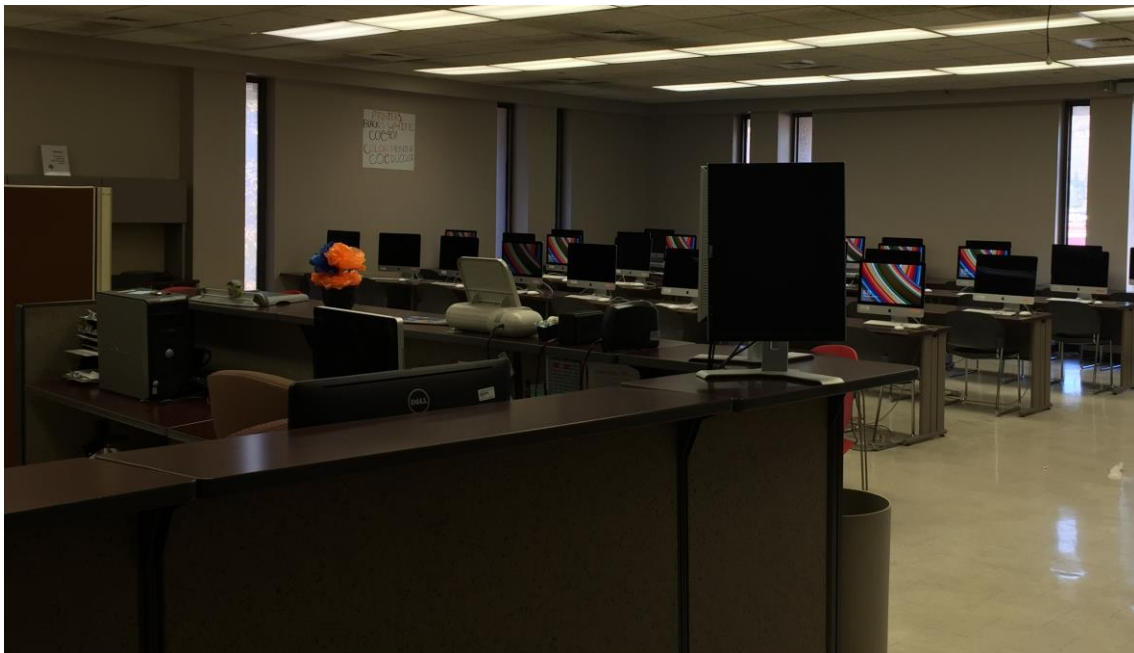


Julie

Journalism class at Southwest High School



Computer lab at BU



Nadia

Career and technical education – Business class at Southwest High School



Math tutoring center at CC



Natalia

Cafeteria at Southwest High School



Technology Center at BU



Nina

Gymnasium at Southwest High School



Cafeteria at BU



Vita

Luciene Wandermurem earned her Bachelor degree in English/Portuguese Languages and Literature from Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2004. In 2008, she received her Masters of Arts degree in Education from the University of Texas at El Paso. In 2008 she joined the doctoral program in Teaching, Learning, and Culture at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Ms. Wandermurem received numerous honors and awards including the Dodson Graduate School Research Grant, the Frank B. Cotton Estate Fund Scholarship, UTEP Student Travel Grant, and the Women's Auxiliary Fellowship. While pursuing her degree, Ms. Wandermurem worked as an instructor and as a research assistant at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Ms. Wandermurem presented her research at national and international conference meetings including the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Literacy Research Association (LRA). Additionally, she has published in the MEXTESOL Journal, the Literacy Research Association Yearbook, and in the Journal of Language and Literacy Education. Ms. Wandermurem's dissertation entitled "Entering the World of University: The Literacies and Identities of Latino/a Youth in their Transitions from High School to College," was supervised by Dr. Erika Mein.

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This dissertation was typed by Luciene Soares Wandermurem.