

THE INTERSECTING IDENTITIES OF AN ADOLESCENT MEXICAN AMERICAN GIRL CONSTRUCTED VIA HER LITERATE ACTIVITIES

by

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(Under the Direction of Peter Smagorinsky)

ABSTRACT

In this case study conducted as a narrative inquiry lasting for three years, the author describes the lived realities of an early adolescent Mexican American girl living with undocumented parents as represented through her transactions with literacy. The body of this paper is organized into three articles.

The first article describes my participant's experiences growing up in an undocumented Mexican American family. Evidence in this paper primarily consists of observations and interview transcripts, wherein she discussed both her mother's border crossing experience, and her everyday life in the U.S. as the first U.S.-born member of the family. Utilizing Anzaldúa (1987) and DeChaine's (2012) notion of cultural bordering and García and Wei's (2014) concept of translanguaging, I describe the way she captured her living experiences and cultural and linguistic positioning through language.

The second article focuses on my participant's literate experiences, particularly writing, as a means to convey her complex cultural and national affiliation. Her dialogic cultural positioning was manifested through translanguaging and hybrid cultural references (Bakhtin, 1986; Bhabha, 1990; García & Wei, 2014). This article derives much of its support from the

actual writing she composed, and describes the relationship between language and cultural identity, both in its formation and its expression. I further contend that bilingual and translanguaging processes act as bridge between her cultural and linguistic memberships, and function as indication of her cultural identification.

The last article addresses the effect of intersectionality (Núñez, 2014) in my participant's identity, and how literacy often acts as that intersection. The many dimensions of her identity, from her own race or culture, to her age, to her gender, her class, her geographical region, her relationship with popular culture, her engagements with other cultures, and her spirituality, all intersect with her literacies. These categories of her being engage in complex mutual innervation, so that one dimension's strengths may compensate for another's shortcomings. Her identity's complexities are addressed and their synthesis shown through her speech, behaviors, and writing.

INDEX WORDS: Narrative inquiry, Case study, Bakhtin, Núñez, Translanguaging, Hybridity, Literacy, Intersectionality, Border-crossing, Cultural identity, Hermans, Undocumented Mexican immigrants

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to Maria, and all others like her who struggle to find and accept themselves through literacy in a context that may not always be welcoming. May they persevere and reach their loftiest dreams.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Inside one of the simple identical dwellings at the center of the lower-income neighborhood on the edge of town, a Mexican American early adolescent girl, “Maria,” stood in her kitchen at the sink scrubbing potatoes, helping prepare dinner for the family of six. For one year, she had been involved in my pilot study investigating the writing behaviors of early adolescent Mexican American students, when she had shared with me her various compositions and we had conducted monthly interviews regarding her pieces, as well as the intersections of her family, community, and daily life.

The interviews tended to take place in the living room or on the dinner table in the dining room, where her mother could be seen sweeping the floor, immaculate and spotless, while carrying her toddler son. My participant’s youngest sister read her Little Golden Book copy of the Little Mermaid for the umpteenth time on the couch, as her middle sister practiced jumping off of one of its armrests, and then did cartwheels across the living room floor. Meanwhile, the girls awaited their stepfather to return home from a grueling day-laboring job, before tending the night shift at the poultry processing plant in a few hours.

In the living room, the television intermittently blared daytime *telenovelas* (soap operas) and *canciones ranchera* (songs from the ranch) from Univisión, which was the staple of the house. Actually, though born here, Maria’s favorite show was not on MTV, but the Mexican telenovela *La Rosa de Guadalupe*. Across from the television set were two couches positioned perpendicular to each other, meeting at the edge of the room. Above one couch was a large,

solemn, bronze-plated image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, hands folded in prayer, with golden rays of light jutting from her halo. In fact, the tradition of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Moffitt, 2006), herself a Mexican version of the Virgin Mary, begets a transnational consciousness (Vertovec, 2001). Legend contends that the Virgin appeared in Mexico before a native peasant named Juan Diego as the mother of Christ, speaking to him in his native Aztec tongue, personifying the translanguaging practices articulating her cultural hybridity (Canagarajah, 2011).

The Virgin has since become a symbol of both spirituality and nationalism for Mexicans, partially responsible for uniting distinct tribes in a cohesive national identity. Her ability to transgress cultures and languages are remarkable, as the colonial Spanish version of this saint has found an indigenous American venue. Infused with such narratives, Maria's life also crossed linguistic and cultural boundaries daily, managing distinct cultural elements which may be at odds with one another. Stories of hyperbole and magical realism had always been a part of my participant's world (Honeyford, 2013), as these narratives then formed the catalyst for her own lived story.

As Maria would get comfortable in her chair across from me, her eyes brightened, and a sly smile slivered across her face. She had grown accustomed to doing these hour-long interviews by now as a participant for my study researching the ways one Mexican American adolescent girl composed her ethnic and racial cultural identities, and I could see the rush of stories kept at bay by her wide eyes and pursed lips. As soon as I turned on my tape recorder, the flood gates opened, and one story toppled upon another.

She read me the tales she wrote for her English class of the precious night her baby brother was born, and about listening to Mexican ghost stories at Halloween; later she spoke

about defending her sister from a neighborhood bully and being punished by her mom by getting sent to her room with nothing but a book, a pen, and a pad of paper. It was in that very room she shared with her two sisters that her love of literacy first began years ago. Throughout her life, books and her imagination had taken her and her stories outside to distant, magical worlds, even as she sat nestled in her corner of the bedroom. While reading and writing such stories, she began to discover herself, her own story, and where she wanted that story to take her.

Statement of the Problem

In many sentences Maria composed, I could hear the hybridity of distinct cultural voices together. I wondered about what forces contributed to her cultural identity. I also asked how her story, her voice, her reality could be engendered via composition of language, how her multiple cultural and linguistic references could co-create her own sense of hybrid, transnational, and bilingual cultural identity. All of the different components of her identity intersected in her literate activities.

Bakhtin (1981) envisions hybridity as the “mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor” (p. 358). To him, the hybrid world exists as a double-voiced entity where dual forces negotiate reality together. In fact, in the engagement of words, Maria’s “two languages [were] crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis, two speaking subjects” (p.76), so her voice was a personification of dual consciousness.

It is in this very meeting of distinct social tendencies where I see the multiple, hybrid identities of minority culture adolescents in the U.S. unveiled and synthesized through their

literate activities (Bigelow, 2010), most poignantly in encountering these multiple cultural and linguistic consciousnesses via writing their lives (Cuero, 2009). I seek to understand how these distinct identities interact and transact within these transnational students, and how this process affects and is affected by their literacy education in a dialogic relationship.

This in-between cultural phenomenon has always fascinated me, as an ethnic minority immigrant to the U.S. from China myself when I had just turned seven. In the first few years in my new country, I felt a sense of wonder and excitement. Everything was novel to me, and I was novel to others in the predominantly White community in southern New Hampshire. Before long, the U.S. sense of freedom and optimism had innervated my soul, as I felt less tied to my Chinese roots, and had enthusiastically embraced the American way of life, the Western way of thinking, much to my grandparents' chagrin.

In Language Arts classes in my U.S. elementary school, I had begun tasting literature in English, from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Ramona*, to *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Beloved*, and *Invisible Man* when I entered middle and high school. I had also learned to create my own story through the written word as I utilized English to express myself. Those tales I read and created attached to schemas built by Chinese childhood bedtime stories, like the fable of the *Seven Calabash Brothers*, as well as *The Journey to the West*, told to me in Chinese by my father when I was a boy in China as the first faint wisps of sleep fell on my eyes. The Chinese language sowed the seeds for my literary understanding and my appreciation of language. Soon, however, two cultural and linguistic voices chorused meanings and life scripts, and prompted my transactions with the world. The stories of our lives draw meaning from, and attach new meaning to, these primordial tales of our existence (Bohn & Berntsen, 2008).

For my academic endeavors in language and literacy education now in my adulthood, I conducted research in a community of ethnic minorities and Latin American families in the southeastern United States. The location of their homes existed in isolation on the fringes of town, far beyond the last stretch of middle-class suburban neighborhoods. The tenements were identical two-bedroom beige wooden houses, void of lawns and backyards. The children played in communal patches of wild, unkempt grass and red clay, sullyng themselves in midst the throws of childhood.

I felt a connection between their lives and experiences and my own as a young immigrant, as an unsanctioned outsider considered somehow not as “American.” My own life in the U.S. also started in such low-income neighborhoods in family housing at the University of New Hampshire. I remember needing used clothes donated to me at Christmas, and my embarrassment when peers at school recognized their outgrown shirts on me following winter break. I remember struggling to be accepted by my White American classmates. But, my own childhood was mostly mud-caked and unencumbered, where the outside world took the place of video-games, where my imagination constructed wild kingdoms out of the ordinary. Vibrant imaginations and fantasies can be nurtured by such a life of material paucity.

Mexican immigrants first began migrating to the U.S. in the early 20th century due primarily to labor demands in the U.S. and political unrest in Mexico (Zong & Batalova, 2014). As of 2013, there are approximately 11.6 million Mexican immigrants in the U.S. The flow has followed four waves, with the first from 1900 to 1930, when agricultural laborers increased the Mexican American population six-fold to about 625,000. The Bracero program from 1942 to 1964 ushered the second wave of Mexican agricultural guest workers. In 1965, the Bracero program halted, and quotas were placed on immigration from Mexico and other Latin American

countries. Those immigrants from this wave were seasonal workers who commuted between Mexico and the U.S. annually. The fourth wave followed passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, when the U.S. legalized some 2.3 unauthorized Mexican immigrants, and tightened border security and imposed punishments for hiring illegal immigrants. Between 1990 and 2010, more than 7.5 million Mexican immigrants, many of whom were undocumented, arrived in the U.S.

The topic of the present study is to explore how the cultural identities of one Mexican American adolescent middle school student from an undocumented family transacted with the majority cultural context through her literacy. Latinx¹ populations in the U.S. have soared in recent years, in particular those from Central and South America, from countries like Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, and Cuba (Jones-Correa, 2007). However, from the perspective of the dominant culture of their new home, there may be a tendency to lump these unique cultures together as one homogeneous identity (Flores, 2000). There may be insufficient understanding of each culture's unique postcolonial mentality and indigenous heritage. It is in this cultural context, of diversity and cohesion, of finding commonality and individuality, both with the mainstream culture and within their own heritage one, that I see Mexican American adolescents struggling to claim their own hybrid identity. More specifically, I examined how the speech and writing of this student, such as fictional stories, personal narratives, journal entries, poetry, and also academic writing, reflected this dialogue of cultures (Bakhtin, 1986; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Her culture was one of hybridity (Bhabha, 1991), representing a cultural intermingling and fusion (Bakhtin, 1984a). Her written productions and speech may be inspired from such a synthesis.

¹ van Horne's (2016) gender neutral referent to people of Latin American ancestry

Currently, the voices of Mexican American students and funds of knowledge tied to these foreign frames of reference are largely ignored in the U.S. school system (García & Gaddes, 2012; Gonzales, 2005). In analyzing her composition, both in- and out-of-school, I explored the connections and interactions between her heritage home culture and the dominant sanctioned school culture. I looked for examples of cultural and linguistic influences, such as discussions of Mexican and U.S. holiday traditions, and writing composed both in Spanish and English. In noting the writing tone, as well as themes and cultural artifacts, I explored the intersection and interfaces of my participant's multiple frames of reality. These distinct articulations of the world may coalesce and author new meaning and understanding via her writing and speech.

I researched how these multiple identities are reflected through the stories of her life and in her writing, and how one girl's unique voice is revealed. This intermix of linguistic identities is perhaps most clearly expressed in often stigmatized inter-language forms, including Spanglish, a meld of Spanish and English (Stavans, 2008), Konglish, a blend of Korean and English (Nam, 2011), or Chinglish, a mix of Chinese and English (Henry, 2010). In particular, writing can be viewed as a representation of this cultural conflict or tension for these students. From this study, in part, I intend to investigate the evidence we see of how specifically one Mexican American adolescent girl uses writing as a contact zone (Pratt, 1991) where her multiple cultures and languages transact amidst their multiple personal and social identities.

Mary Louise Pratt (1991) uses the term contact zones "to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism [and] slavery" (p.34). As such, contact zones may be especially pertinent to discussions of Mexican American students with postcolonial heritages (Jones-Correa, 2007). These are spaces where the identities of these students can engage with the

mainstream culture and language. Different cultural students can be found in such spaces of tension that can lead to personal stress, and often, their identities are actually formed amidst this turmoil. Such students may construct their ethnic cultural identities using writing, both in and out of schools. They may use their English, their second language, to compose texts for teachers to conform to cultural expectations of scholarship, and the writing and speech that they produce acts as a contact zone between their multiple cultural, linguistic, and social memberships.

Mexican American adolescents in the U.S. most clearly embody this hybridity (García & Gaddes, 2012). Being immersed in dominant U.S. culture, innervated with the native heritage cultures and languages of their homes, these students are not only managing multiple cultural and linguistic identities, but also constructing their own transnational (Basch, Schiller, Blanc, 2000; Vertovec, 2001) and hybrid (Bhabha, 1990; Gonzales, 2005) selves amidst these tensions. It is in these cultural encounters that I see the synthesis of the unique identities of Mexican American adolescents.

I identified one early adolescent Mexican American girl from an undocumented family. Her hybridized, in-between cultural classifications created tensions in her schooling experiences. As I work with her and her undocumented community, both as a researcher and counselor in the after-school program in their community enclave, questions arose. How could she achieve academically when she was assessed by English-driven, White middle-class male values? How could her linguistic and cultural references and resources serve as places of valid origins for ideas heard by and understood in our Anglophonic, standardized classrooms? In particular, I sought to understand how the many components of her identity came together to form her individuality, each with their unique strengths and limitations.

While in school, these students bring their own linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge to language arts classrooms (García & Gaddes, 2012). My experiences working with this population are the source of some of my ponderings over the construction, and specifically the writing of (Canagarajah, 2011; Cuero, 2009), adolescent Mexican American cultural identities in this age of globalization (Knight et al., 2014). I wonder whether there is a form of inter-writing, similar to a spoken inter-language (Egi, 2010), for these young authors where their writing is reflective of their morphing cultural positioning and complex senses of self, as a dialogue between their two languages, grammatically, syntactically, and lexically.

Research Questions

This study explored the intersectionality of one adolescent Mexican American student's life as manifested by her behavior, speech, and writing. I investigated to what extent the content of student writing, as well as the form of that writing, corresponds to her heritage, home culture and language, which may include indigenous themes, such as traditional holidays or cuisine, and their unique heritage Spanish diction or grammar.

My first research question was what was the cultural positioning of my participant as expressed in her observations, interviews, and composition, and how had her community and family affected and influenced that cultural identity. Next, I asked how her literacy specifically acted as the manifestation and mediator of that dialogue of cultures. Lastly, I wondered how the other components of her identity, including her gender, class, socioeconomic status, and spirituality, all intersected in her being (Núñez, 2014).

Evident in such expressions were also the idiosyncratic wishes and desires of an early adolescent, ethnic minority girl. I sought to understand specifically how such writing, which could include academic prose to personal narratives, to creative and poetic pieces, could be

viewed as a dialogue of two languages and cultures. Her expressions, both spoken and written manifested the dialogic nature of cultural identities for such an adolescent, while grappling with common developmental stressors (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

More specifically, I explored how writing practices could reflect the cultural interplays of these young writers. I intended to study the ways the written text, its morphology, syntax, diction, style, and content, reflected certain cultural identities or affinities of the Mexican American adolescent writer. I sought how her intersecting developmental, cultural, and linguistic identities manifested as acculturation points in her life. The idea of cultural identity itself cannot be thought of solely as one's racial or ethnic identity, as the notion may also encompass one's gender and socioeconomic status (Crane, 2000; Núñez, 2014), along with one's political ideology (Perry, 2014). However, for this paper, I tapered the concept to the narrowed meanings of racial and ethnic identity. Other dimensions will be explicitly stated.

Significance of the Research

As the Latinx population rises in the U.S. to assume the majority minority position (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), with Mexican Americans the most represented heritage, their education and acculturation play important roles not only with respects to the shifting demographics, but also in the cultural, political, and economic policies of this nation. They are the youngest and fastest growing segment of the population. These youths' cultural identities can be likened to the Middle Passage of contemporary society, rife with displacement and disjunction, with ambivalence and struggle (Bhabha, 1991). They live and are immersed in the "cultural and historic hybridity of the postcolonial world" (Bhabha, 1991, p.31), a context that may not yet fully heed their educational needs (Leal & Meier, 2011).

These young people may experience a transient, in-betweenness quality, a transitory bidirectional cultural passage (Sznitman, Baron-Epel, & Boker-Keinan, 2013), a state characterized by the dialogic synthesis of diverse cultural affinities (Bakhtin, 1986; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The constructed hybrid identity is both a blend of cultural practices and a site for cultural struggle and conflict (Gonzales, 2005), as evidenced in their literacy experiences, notably writing (Cuero, 2009).

As Mexican Americans make up more substantial portions of the U.S. population (11.14%²), their cultural tendencies and those of the mainstream culture increasingly encounter each other. Latinx students, in particular adolescents (Stewart, 2013), personify this synergy as they experience literacy in unique ways that incorporate both cultural repertoires and distinct perspectives. Their writing, in particular, flows from both divergent realities and dissimilar contexts, to claim and author multivoiced selves (Bakhtin, 1981; Cuero, 2009). If Language Arts classrooms can recognize, validate, and even nurture such heteroglossic authorship, the students' multiple cultural and linguistic positions are honored.

Language and literacy are ways through which we communicate and understand our worlds and ourselves. Literacy activities give these Mexican American adolescents venues of expression and engagement (Stewart, 2013), a forum where they may feel unfettered enough from the binds of stigma and subjugation, to be powerful agents of change in their world. Through their literacy activities, these youths' multiple cultural and linguistic affiliations and identities can engage in dialogic innervation with each other, codemeshing and blending languages to best suit the writer's needs (Canagarajah, 2011).

² U.S. Census Bureau (2015)

Specifically, the rural Southeast, where this study was conducted, has become the new destination for Mexican migration in recent years (Marrow, 2011). This region of the U.S. has long been considered a monolingual, monocultural geography largely resistant to outside cultural influences, a preconception that has been troubled in recent decades (Hazen, 2000). As one indicator of the changing demographics of the region, the Latinx population of the South has risen sharply in recent years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), from a population of just over 100,000 in 1990 to over 800,000 in this state more recently. This salient population shift also introduced new social and educational challenges.

A substantial portion of that population remains undocumented (Odem & Browne, 2011), living in the shadows of this region, cowering in the unseen places of rural countryside and forgotten urban sprawl. The reality of the situation is “Hispanic newcomers and their children in the rural South now face far more serious prospects for marginalization and disenfranchisement” (Marrow, 2011, p.252). These rural spaces, especially the local public schools where Mexican American students attend, have become transformative sites for cultural and linguistic encounter and mutual influence. Beyond the macro-level cultural shifts occurring in the southeastern U.S., or perhaps as one of the causes, I also see micro-level individual cultural change amongst the adolescents of this community, especially evidenced in, or assisted by, their transaction with language via writing (Cuero, 2009; García & Gaddes, 2012).

The rural South’s economic expansion in recent decades has attracted undocumented Mexican migrants seeking employment (Atilas & Bohon, 2002). The sectors which readily welcome these workers include poultry processing, textiles, construction, and landscaping, generally low-paying employments devoid of benefits. Major factors hindering the assimilation and accommodation of these individuals, as well as their alienation from society, include their

limited English speaking skills and literacy. Perhaps in highlighting their lived experiences, this study will further understanding of and improve the experiences of this population in this setting.

In this study, I explore the ways in which one Mexican American adolescent in this context authored her multiple cultural selves in her speech and writing, which could be viewed as a dialogue between the two distinct dominant cultures in which she lived (Bakhtin, 1986; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). In being able to interweave between two languages in her spoken words and written composition (Canagarajah, 2011), between two cultural orientations (García & Gaddes, 2012), two frames of mind, her writing became a cultural amalgam that was as multivoiced as the hybrid author herself. In encouraging and validating such manifestations of expression, might our literacy education also welcome a more global, international orientation?

For instance, Maria wrote several bilingual poetic pieces that capture both of her dual identities, wielding a distinct blend of languages to unveil a unique passion laced with an exclusive metalinguistic and multicultural perspective (Gort, 2006). This work can assist language arts teachers in better understanding their Mexican American students' writings as measure of their cultural affiliation and identification. The transaction not only occurs on the linguistic and semantic levels, but also on the cultural level, so that these young writers are not only representing and writing their own voices, but perhaps that of an entire community (Nieto, 2013).

It is in this dialogue of heterogeneous cultural positions that I see these adolescents construct their multiple cultures and senses of self, on the edges of developmental and cultural borders, amidst internally constructed boundaries of cultural impasse and those linguistic, ideological, and national boundaries of impassability. In this tense, inertial political space, such

youths struggle to find their multiple bearings, both culturally and linguistically, through the written word.

Theoretical Framework

I utilize the works of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1986) and Hubert Hermans and colleagues (1992, 1996, 2001, 2010) to conceptualize the dialogic and fluid nature of cultural orientations, as evidenced in the writing productions of Mexican American early adolescents. Cultural identity in current times has increasingly become an amorphous, vague phenomenon, capable of hybrid, dynamic, and unsanctioned perspectives that invite the influences of multiple voices and perspectives. The notion of national culture itself, then, also becomes increasingly unbound and deterritorialized.

Dialogue forms the web that connects the various cultural voices, and encounters them in the mind and on the page (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). Particularly, a writer is engaged through the act of writing in a dialogic exchange with hir³ own text, as ze⁴ think, plan, and edit phrases in hir mind (Vygotsky, 1978). The written words that are produced then interact in dialogue with each other, perhaps changing the meaning of other surrounding words. For example, the phrase “he was fine” can mean different things depending on the preceding text and the context of its usage. “Fine” could refer to one’s physical health, performance on a task, or perhaps physical appearance. Thus, the dialogical processes of contextual cues not only influence the tone of utterances, but also the actual parole of individual words (de Saussure, 2011).

With respect to the ethnic cultural minority author, ze may dialogue with hir own thoughts as ze composes written text in an inner dialogue, thoughts that also interact with the

³ Rawson’s (2010) gender-neutral possessive pronoun instead of his/her

⁴ Rawson’s (2010) gender-neutral pronoun instead of she/he

cultural context of his surroundings (Bakhtin, 1986). Then, as they are written, his words dialogue with each other on the page, and finally even dialogue out with the world once they are read. As a consequence, these words begin to prompt incipient words in others. The dynamic can also empower recipients of dialogue to become actors in their world, as “(i)n the process of dialogic communication, the object is transformed into the subject” (p.145). This notion in the present context can describe the processes of mutual interaction among this author’s multiple ethnic or racial cultural voices, and also between those voices and the larger world. Dialogue characterizes the process of symbiotic, mutual effect of words and psyches.

As a consequence of these distinct voices, I characterize these youths’ lives as manifestations of a double-voicedness (Bakhtin, 1981), which has been extended to conceptualize these Mexican American student identities, perhaps evidenced as multiple, integral cultural *I*-positions (Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loons, 1992). When such exogenous culturally-positioned students transact with their mainstream dominant cultural context, both they and their context is affected. Bakhtin’s (1984a; 1986) notions of cultural hybridity and dynamism help portray and characterize these students’ complex cultural identities. This dialogue is especially evident in interactions and transactions with literacy. To him, “the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops *on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects*” (Bakhtin, 1984b, p.106, emphasis in original).

Perhaps Bakhtin’s (1984b) idea of “Schwellendialog” (p.178) captures their state of minds most accurately, as being a “dialogue of the threshold.” As these youths possibly straddle their heritage cultures and the mainstream U.S. culture, their ways of composing their lives also depict the dialogic synergy at the threshold between the two worlds. Both Bakhtin (1986) and

Hermans (1996, 2001) thus describe a fluid, heterogeneous notion of self, fraught with the tensions of their coexistence, a coexistence managed via the dialogue between and amongst them. These multiple identities engage with each other and among themselves, influencing and altering each other. Perhaps, Maria's White American self gravitated toward Disney movies, yet her Mexican self held onto those Mexican ghost stories orally transmitted by elders in her community across generations. Her perception of each medium, the Disney movies and ghost stories, were influenced by her experiences of the other, as she could cross reference and allude to the other cultural context in her comprehension in "a 'dualistic' form of awareness where the *I* is strongly detached from specific positions" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.10). This dialogic expression can also manifest in the unique written productions of Mexican American adolescents, which can be characterized as just as hybrid as the transnational writers themselves. The act of writing itself can act as this dialogue of cultures, languages, and identities (Vygotsky, 1978).

Immersed in such a world, the ethnic minority self both belongs and dissociates from its surroundings, interacting dialogically with a dominant cultural medium that simultaneously accepts and refutes its existence. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) refers to this phenomenon as how the "self-conflict of two positions or voices can push the individual into two different or even opposed directions" (p.121). Life in such a space of innumerable cultural encounters of the interconnected, digital community engenders "the uncertainties typical of a globalizing world where different social rules meet on the interface of different subcultures" (p.12). The self may hold split allegiances to multiple cultures, fragmented ways of perceiving and interpreting the world.

Du Bois (2006) conceived of this notion as a *double consciousness* made up of “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (p.7). This split consciousness of dual cultures nurtures two beings living in conjunction, at times disquietingly together. Although referring specifically to the African American subculture, this concept can also extend to characterize other racial or ethnic minorities’ experiences in the United States, like those from Latin America (Falicov, 2005). Bakhtin (1984b) also speaks of this “plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with his own world” (p.6). The frictional symbiosis mirrors Maria’s own fractional frames of reference, one White American and one Mexican, perhaps elucidated via her written words. Her distinct fragments of “*I fluctuate among different and even opposed positions*” (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loons, 1992, p.28). The tension of this fractured self is partially relieved through the composition and sharing of her writing.

Within her written texts there may then be a double-voicedness, representing a dialogue of cultures (Bakhtin, 1986; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Bakhtin (1981) characterizes this double-voicedness as “prefigured in language itself (in authentic metaphors, as well as in myth), in language as a social phenomenon that is becoming in history, socially stratified and weathered in this process of becoming” (p.326). Then, the ways ethnic minority writers compose their dual voices typify this transitional phenomenon, where their cultural identities are never inertial. Perhaps these distinct *I*-positions may clash and trouble each other (Hermans, 2001). Conversely, the different selves may also complement and bolster one another, forging a different, more intricate and complex sense of self and the world, as expressed via their writing. Both Bakhtin and Hermans’ thinking offer greater depth of understanding for these individuals’ cultural interplay as they compose the written word.

In fact, Bakhtin (1986) postulates that this “dialogic encounter of two cultures does not [always] result in merging or mixing” (p.7). The integrity of the distinct cultural identities of individuals is not somehow shattered when they encounter each other. In ethnic minority individuals, many retain portions of their cultural identity, either adopted or heritage, while allowing others to sway with their context. Cultures do not dissolve into one another, but rather form a hybrid that contains elements of each.

The ethnic and cultural minority authors may produce works that represent “a typical double-accented, double-styled *hybrid construction*” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.304). Each accent in their lines pertains to another cultural *I*-position (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), where their written words interact, among themselves and with their contexts. Their writing becomes a “living discourse” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.331) where “no living word relates to its object in a singular way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other” (p.276). Such is the dialogic relationship of words and their context.

A hybridity of ethnic or racial cultural positions results from the dialogic nature of such a double-voiced consciousness (Bakhtin, 1981), where distinct identities form a hybridized version exemplifying a culturally hybrid (Bhabha, 1990) or transnational consciousness (Vertovec, 2001). In this space, one’s cultural consciousness is a blended amalgam of different cultural tendencies, often times engaged in a form of “verbal give-and-take” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.314), negotiating and rendering an identity, a consciousness, beget from often countering forces.

In the process, the adolescent minority author is embarked on a journey of both literary and developmental maturation, a journey of dialogic discovery of the self and of the world through composition of language (Ball & Freedman, 2004). In fact, Bakhtin (1981) postulates

“the ideological becoming of a human being, in this view, is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (p.341). Through his engagement with language, he grows and changes, his engagement with a morphing world then a dynamic process.

In the literate activities of these individuals, their multiple dimensions of being are sometimes expressed (Núñez, 2014). The intersection of their various split selves converge and overlap in different contexts which activate certain expressions. These intersections of selves form different degrees of cultural manifestation, where the individual holds distinct *I*-positions (Hermans, 2001), or perspectives, that bolster some facets of identity, while hampering others, in the certain contexts of their expression.

Definition of Key Terms

Although the following appears to give resolute correlations between terms and their corresponding meanings, I preface this section with the fact that these terms are being described in ways that best suit the needs of this paper. As Bakhtin (1981) postulates, the word is a living entity, and meanings change and are in flux depending on the cultural context and its chronotope, or “points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse” (p.84). As such, there may be other definitions, other variations, or absent conjectures from the following descriptions.

Acculturation: This notion refers to the process of cultural immersion or acceptance for a foreign individual (Akhtar, 2011). There may be psychosocial trauma associated from social isolation, as well as contentions of divergent religious or cultural identities. This process “involves the cultural and behavioural changes that result from contact between groups and individuals who have different cultural backgrounds” (Berry, 2013, p.57), and an adoption of a new set of behavioral or psychological schema for the individuals.

Adolescence: A developmental period encompassing the ages 11 to 20 (Cristina & Adriana, 2014) which is characterized by marked physical, emotional, and social change (Vadeboncoeur & Stevens, 2005). This developmental stage is also a crucial period for developing ethnic and cultural identities (Cuero, 2009).

Cultural Dialogue: Process of mutual cultural innervation and effect (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). In this phenomenon, cultures “engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings [within] these cultures. [Participants] raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; [they] seek answers to [their] own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to [them] by revealing to [them] its new aspects and new semantic depths” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7). Both cultures are revealed to the other, and in the process, both are changed. This act can occur internally within the individual as well (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

Cultural Identity: For the purposes of this paper, cultural identity refers mostly to racial and ethnic cultural identity, even though gender, sexual identity, geographical residence, political affiliation, and ideological positioning can also be encompassed by this term. Even perhaps an allegiance to a particular sports club, hobby, or recreational community can also be associated with a cultural identity. This identity marker corresponds to one’s cultural orientation or from which set of cultural narratives one views the world (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). This concept can be heterogeneous and multiple, especially with regards to Latinx adolescents in this age of globalization.

Heteroglossia: This term corresponds to the idea of multiple voices within a single individual or text (Bakhtin, 1981). The meaning embodies:

(A) diversity of social speeches (sometimes even a diversity of languages) and as a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, personal jargon, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day (pp. 262-263).

In terms of ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities, this concept describes the polyphony of cultural and linguistic voices with which they may engage (Tate, 2007).

Hybridity: The phenomenon involves the “mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance...separated from one another by an epoch, (or) by social differentiation” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.358). With reference to ethnic cultural and linguistic minorities, this notion embodies how they may hail “from all parts of the world, develop multiple and hybrid cultural identities rather than selves that are unified or ‘purely integrated’ in the host societies” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.91). It is in fact this very “negotiation of contradictory and antagonistic instances that opens up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle” (Bhabha, 1991, p.37).

Identity: This notion is how one defines him or herself, or how ze may be perceived by society. This idea is not some static trait, but one that morphs with the cultural, temporal, and situational context (Bakhtin, 1981; Hermans, 2001). Beyond purely psychological definitions, this idea not only changes according to developmental stages, but also with the cultural and linguistic space (Blommaert, 2010; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

Inter-Language: Term characterizing the transition between L1 to L2 where the language is an intermediate vernacular between the two sanctioned languages (Egi, 2010). In this state, partial language efficacy, for example “certain responses, such as repair and modified output” (p.2), justify a transient, intermediate state of second language acquisition.

Intersectionality: Notion that recognizes the multiple intersection of compounding factors of oppression. Minority women, in particular, are at times “multi-burdened” (Crenshaw, 1989, p.140), and their multiple layers of oppression overlooked by scholars. For instance, Latina participants report “varying degrees of saliency of these identities” (Núñez, 2014, p.44), as their gender, race, and socioeconomic class all form “interlocking systems of oppression, such as racism and sexism” (p.34).

I-Position: Concept coined by Hermans and colleagues (1992, 1996, 2001, 2010), to describe “explicitly the ‘rivalry and conflict of the different selves,’ dealing with the inherent discontinuity of the self” (Hermans, 2001, p.246). They may indicate a certain psyche, a certain culture, or even perhaps a certain language (Blommaert, 2010). These are then certain ways of seeing ourselves, especially as multilingual and multicultural immigrants, and the world that begets a different frame of reference (Abu El-Haj, 2009). There is also an idea of disunity of independent selves that combine to somehow achieve a tenuous unity. Our definitions of ourselves, and our world, shift with changes in the innumerable number of *I*-positions within ourselves. Our identities are simultaneously whole and multiple, congruous and disjointed.

Latin America: The countries of the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, with colonial ties to European nations (Jones-Correa, 2007). Latin America begins as far north as Mexico and ends with Argentina and Chile to the South. Politically, this region struggles between authoritarian regimes and democracy. Linguistically, Spanish and Portuguese are the

main languages spoken, along with French, Quechua, Mayan languages, and English. Spiritually, the Catholic faith dominates the region, with the Caribbean region harboring Haitian voodoo, Rastafarianism, Cuban Santeria, and the Spiritual Baptists of Trinidad.

Latinx: A gender neutral term to refer to a person of Latin American heritage (van Horne, 2016), as opposed to the *Latino* designation for such characterization which assumes a male-dominated perspective. This term “is one attempt among many to break down the masculine/feminine binary” in discourse to describe people of Latin American heritage (para. 20). For the purposes of this research, the term Latinx refers to Hispanic persons with Mexican, and Central and South American heritage and ties.

Literacy: Literacy involves the ability to read and write, and to engage with language (Parr & Campbell, 2012). These skills form the educational foundation to prepare individuals to secure their own communicative needs, as well as contribute to the social and economic development of their communities and countries.

Transnationalism: This designation has been “characterized by the ‘deterritorialized nation-state’” (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998, p.8) as the result of the “(c)ultural hybridity, multi-positional identities, border-crossing by marginal ‘others,’ and transnational business practices by migrant entrepreneurs” (p.5). In fact, such a characterization has been termed in juxtaposition to traditional notions of pure cultural or national identity (Vertovec, 2001).

Writing: Method of human communication and transference of information or sharing of thoughts and emotions via the use of arbitrary visual symbols forming a system of understanding (Writing, 2014). Such activity is dictated by language rules and conventions for that certain language or language system. In recent years, computer and other digital devices have transformed the ways in which we write and share writing.

Introduction of Rest of Dissertation

The subsequent material of this paper deals with a literature review of relevant studies regarding adolescent Mexican American students' written composition and cultural identities. The remaining sections illustrate my actual case study of a Mexican American adolescent girl's writing behaviors, and how these activities relate to, or construct, her sense of cultural identity. I have written three articles, each addressing an important area of this research. The first article deals with the cultural positioning of my participant, and its effect from the community and her family. The next paper deals with her literate experiences as a dialogic manifestation of that cultural identity. The last one deals with the intersectionality of my participant's various identities, and how they are showcased via her literacy. There was actual writing done by the Mexican American adolescent girl depicted by an analysis of language, themes, and grammar demonstrated a bicultural orientation, along with interview data from transcript excerpts. There is then a discussion and conclusion section to coalesce the materials of this paper, along with directions for future research.

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CHAPTER 2: A LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This research deals with the intersections of Mexican American ethnic cultural identity (García, López, & Makar, 2010; Quiroz, 2001), adolescence (Alvermann, 2001; Vadeboncoeur & Stevens, 2005), gender (García & Gaddes, 2012), social class, spirituality, geographical region, popular culture, and writing (Canagarajah, 2011; Cuero, 2009; McCracken & Ortiz, 2013; Quiroz, 2001). This study is framed by Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986) and Hermans' (1996; 2001) thinking, and how they conceive of identity formation and sociocultural influences on literacy. The act of writing perhaps coalesces and synthesizes these identities, or fragments of identity. Writing in this context articulates, develops, and could even generate such identities for immigrant youths. I ponder over the construction, and specifically the writing of adolescent Latinx girls' cultural identities in this age of globalization (Knight et al., 2014). I hypothesize a form of inter-writing, similar to a spoken inter-language (Egi, 2010), for these minority authors where their writing is reflective of their morphing cultural positioning, as a dialogue between their two languages, grammatically, syntactically, and lexically. Here, writing can be conceived of as a cultural tool or "a particular system of symbols and signs whose mastery heralds a critical turning point in the entire cultural development of the child" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.106).

This research focuses on the voice of one adolescent Mexican American fourteen year old girl, Maria, who through her composition of text also reflected and constructed the intersections of her identity (Kamler, 2001; Núñez's, 2014; Quiroz, 2001). Maria's inner speech buoyed to the surface and onto the page via the sometimes tumultuous process of finding

correlate diction to capture her sentiments, to describe her growing, changing self. Through this process, Mexican American adolescents engage with their world in a reflexive manner, enacting a particular identity through writing their lives.

Specifically, narrative writing is a powerful agent for identity affirmation (Kamler, 2001), especially for early adolescent middle grade students of minority cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Mirza, 2011). Although most such students are familiar with Western cultural literary artifacts, like fairytales, some are also well-versed in those tales from their own heritage cultures. Through getting to know indigenous folktales, these students are able to transcend languages, social spheres, and cultures, being empowered and engaged. One middle schooler even commented, “When I’m writing about my own ideas, It’s easy to write” (Mirza, 2011, p.118), as there is an ownership of words and ideas. The cultures of immigrant middle-grade students may be elucidated and honored via such activities (Hull, Storniauolo, & Sahni, 2010).

But, writing for many Latinx immigrant adolescents is clearly a difficult process (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007), as many “students lost track of what they had written and what they were going to say” (p.532). Utilizing a second language is indeed an obstacle to meaningful expression. In the writing that was produced, there was little evidence of connection with the mentor text meant as inspiration. As such, Ivey and Broaddus proposed that writing instruction may need to be consistent with each student’s idiosyncratic family, culture, and educational background and needs, and not be based on teacher sanctioned majority cultural artifacts.

Thus, writing pedagogy targeting Mexican American adolescents necessitates a holistic paradigm that takes into account the many dimensions of the student’s identity that influences written productions (Kamler, 2001). Writing, as a personal activity and an academic requisite,

taps into and manifests the writer's complex cultural identity, perhaps even assisting in forming it through verbalization.

Theoretical Perspective

The gaze of this study was from a Bakhtinian (1981, 1984, 1986) dialogic lens, drawing from the thinking of Hermans (1992, 1996, 2001, 2010) as well to conceptualize the fragmentation of identity for these early adolescent writers. To conceptualize the identity of Maria, and other transcultural youths like her, Bakhtin (1981) alludes "to an organic double-voicedness and to the internal dialogization of living and evolving discourse" (p.327), which affects the identities of immigrant youths in between cultures. Living transnational lives (Vertovec, 2001), they embody two cultural consciousness capable of manifesting in tandem. But, in order to synthesize these identities, I use Núñez's (2014) notion of intersectionality to describe the patterns and relationships among these identities.

These young people can "simultaneously accept and reject their differences from the majority, being engaged in a 'double-voiced' discourse between their individual voices and the majority's dominant voice" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.34). This double-voicedness springs from dual cultural positioning characterizing their schema for the world, allowing them to attain "bipolar landscapes and localized identities" (Vertovec, 2001, p.574), as well as "multi-local affiliations" (p.574).

The processes that connect and make sense of these fragmented notions of self may be the adhesive of a common vernacular, which binds and makes sense of the world. In engaging with language in text, both in reading and writing, the reader or writer also constructs a sense of self. In reading the words of others, and perhaps also writing words for others, the adolescent

may develop a dialogic notion of the self (Alvermann, 2009), which engages in a reciprocal relationships with others, as it develops with contextual inputs.

Bakhtin (1984) conceptualizes this phenomenon within the thinking and planning writer as a hidden dialogicality, wherein the “second speaker is present invisibly, [and] his words are not there, but deep traces left by these words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker” (p.197). Writing connects ideas with the spoken word, but gradually, the intermediate link of speech disappears, and so the written word assumes the same symbolic power. This relationship may beg the question of whether different spoken speech, as in distinct languages, imparts different writing styles and imaginations. The transition from thought to word exists through a series of reflections of meaning, towards which the cultural dimensions of the writer impacts. The written word cannot escape the dialogic innervations of the writer’s spoken language or culture (Bakhtin, 1986), which exists both as context, attributor of meaning, and inspiration. Then, when it is read by an audience, further dialectic transactions can occur, wherein the multiple cultural identities of readers interact with the multiple cultural orientations of text. Together Bakhtin and Hermans frame thinking on this issue by parsing the dimensions of adolescent immigrants’ hybrid sense of linguistic and cultural belonging (García-Sánchez, 2010).

Furthermore, because my participant is an early adolescent Mexican American girl from an undocumented family, there may be “systems of interlocking oppression” in her life (Núñez, 2014, p.34). Her various identities, that of race, culture, class, gender, as well as her familial and social status, may all form her web of “power and oppression [which] influence the life chances of those from historically underserved groups in society” (p.34). As a fourteen year old Mexican

American girl of lower socioeconomic status living in a community fret with drugs and poverty, her multiple social identities may influence the voice in her literate experiences.

Latina Identity

As the Latinx population steadily climbs in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), their education and acculturation play important roles not only with respects to addressing shifting demographics, but also in the cultural, political, and economic policies of this nation. Seventy-seven percent of English Language Learners (ELLs) are Spanish-speakers, now the fastest growing demographic of the K-12 population, with 40% of this population claiming Mexican heritage (Kim et al., 2011). However, the fact remains, Mexican American students perform markedly worse on reading and writing assessments than same-age peers. Although teachers at times encouraged and incorporated Mexican dimensions in the classroom, such as facilitating “multicultural learning by drawing on their [heritage] cultural contributions, such as Mexican *piñatas*” (Marrow, 2010, p. 190), there generally was not sufficient recognition of Mexican culture and heritage in school.

Mexican Americans, like other immigrant youths, may engage in dialogic interplay with their cultural identities (García & Gaddes, 2012; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). For instance, Mexican American girls to try to fit in at school, often experience “the tensions of trying to ‘act like White girls,’ and ‘trying to pass’” (García & Gaddes, 2012, p.152), trying to conform their behavior to some White normality (Stevens, 2005). When they come home, however, they are immersed in the Mexican heritage cultures and languages of their families and home communities. So, we are apt to see dialogic constructions of ethnic identity where youths may vacillate between ethnic identities and cultural memberships (Bakhtin, 1986; Schilling-Estes, 2004).

García, López, and Makar (2010) researched the complex ways Latin American ethnocultural identities are constructed. They found both the cultures of the U.S. and Latin American nations to be heterogeneous and full of the eclectic “colonial and neocolonial categories of race and ethnicity” (p.355). For example, there are three types of nations in Latin America. The first group consists of the “witness nations,” including Mexico, Central America, and the Andean nations of South America. These are nations which were once home to culturally advanced civilizations like the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incans. Their cultural identities thus carry a degree of historical grandeur and pride that may only be superficially veiled by the colonial ruling cultures.

The next cluster is known as the “new nations,” consisting of Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, and the nations of the Caribbean because they are populated by a mix of European, African, and Indigenous populations previously under a tyrannical regime (García et al., 2010). These are peoples with colonized mentalities, where power dynamics are extremely pronounced (Freire, 1970). Finally, there are the “transplanted nations,” such as Argentina and Uruguay, and those English-speaking nations like Belize and Guyana. These are nations of almost complete European conquest of the indigenous population and culture, often through violence. The cultures of these regions may seem most like other North American European colonies, where the native voice has long been silenced due to near total indigenous cultural displacement.

As is evident, the cultures of this geography are not homogenous, nor even regional. Such simplistic monikers as “Latino” or “Hispanic,” “are of dubious validity, since responses to commonly used measures of ethnic identity vary considerably among Spanish-speaking ethnic groups” (Harklau, 2007, p.643). Rather, there is heteroglossia of languages and cultures

(Bakhtin, 1981) due to each nation's unique precolonial and colonial past. Therefore, we cannot view the Latin American culture or people as one distinct, monolithic category. The diverse backgrounds, histories, and languages of each nation challenge a cohesive, singular Latin American identity. As this complex Latinx cultural identity encounters the equally complex and multiracial U.S. context, there may be backlash and resistance (Stewart, 2013). But the present study separates from the others in that specifically the facets of writing will be correlated with Latinx cultural affinity. Those facets, such as the orthography, motifs, diction, tone, and grammar, will be analyzed for cultural and linguistic influences that related to either heritage diction, grammar, and culture, or those U.S. English factors. The focus will be on the actual composition, while bringing in a variety of other information from observations and interviews. Also, this study addresses another need in literature, for the participant in this study is from an undocumented family, and the effect of their documentation status on her writing experiences has not been researched, nor the intersectionality of her multiple identities.

Mexican American Identity

As many as 7,200 unaccompanied minors are arrested annually on their journeys to the U.S. from Central America and Mexico (Tota, 2010), and many of them are adolescents escaping poverty and crime. These adolescent Mexican American immigrants may encounter cultural difficulties after they have arrived in this society (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007; Stewart, 2013), as they manage their multiple indigenous cultural identities in this Anglo-American context (García & Gaddes, 2012; Orellana, 2009). This transnational population experiences the same developmental and academic stressors as their White American peers, and additionally they must simultaneously deal with the task of synthesizing a blended cultural identity while overcoming the trauma of such a harrowing journey. In the U.S. school system, however, currently, the

voices of Mexican American students and funds of knowledge tied to these foreign frames of reference are largely ignored (Gonzales, 2005).

The Mexican American community, in addition, has unique cultural narratives and collective experiences, such as their journey over to the U.S. The transportation bridge between these two different geographical locations is fraught with danger and tribulation (Groody, 2014). Often, Mexican American children speak of the train carrying migrants across the border, referred to as “La Bestia” (“The Beast”) or “El Tren de la Muerte” (“The Train of Death”) (p.20).

These labels connote a primal savagery that accurately describes the harrowing journey, as many itinerants are robbed, beaten, raped, or tortured. Some of these migrants are kidnapped and their families extorted for ransom. In the most extreme cases, even murder and death can result. According to Stewart (2013), with such tales of these journeys, it is no wonder so many Mexican American adolescents cling to their existence in the States. These students’ identities are infused with a collective narrative of trauma, and such spoken recollections can even later be depicted via writing.

In her study, Harklau (2007) identified how young immigrants may experience a range of identities in the U.S., including “ethnic flight” (p.645), “adversarial,” or “transcultural.” Each identity assumes a different degree of identification with the dominant host society. Assuming an ethnic flight identity entails complete identification with the dominant cultural group, relinquishing all vestiges of heritage cultural attachment. Heritage cultural shame could even be one result of this cultural positioning (De Hoyos & Ramirez, 2006).

The next identity is the adversarial identity (Harklau, 2007), which is characterized by constant tension caused by a rejection of the dominant culture. The young person may feel at

odds with the U.S. culture, deciding to form rebellious representations of his or her heritage culture in defiance. The transcultural identity, lastly, consists of a hybrid (Bhabha, 1991) or transnational (Vertovec, 2001) cultural orientation that synthesizes elements of all the cultural positions the youth holds. In this sense, the transcultural identity is reminiscent of a culturally dialogic position (Bakhtin, 1986). In essence, these identities can be seen as correlates of the Latin American nation's cultural positions mentioned prior as well, with witness nations most like the adversarial identity, the transplanted nations consistent with the ethnic flight identity, and the new nations reminiscent of the transcultural position.

According to Devos (2006), there are various stages of acculturation for these minorities, and the process is not always linear. Four patterns of identification are expressed as *integration*, *assimilation*, *separation*, and *marginalization*. The first identity, integration, involves a strong identification of both cultures, meaning the minority individual is acculturated into the host culture while retaining his heritage culture. Assimilation suggests a “strong identification with the mainstream culture and a weak identification with the culture of origin” (p.382). A separation identity is the inverse, with a strong attachment to the culture of origin and a weak attachment to the mainstream. Finally, marginalization denotes “a weak identification of both cultures” (p.382).

Today, immigrant youths live and are immersed in the “cultural and historic hybridity of the postcolonial world” (Bhabha, 1991, p.31). Their cultural identities can be likened to the Middle Passage of contemporary society, rife with displacement and disjunction, with ambivalence and struggle. There is an in-betweenness quality, a transitory bidirectional passage (Sznitman, Baron-Epel, & Boker-Keinan, 2013), a state characterized by the dialogic synthesis of diverse cultural affinities (Bakhtin, 1986; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The

constructed hybrid identity is both a blend of cultural practices and a site for cultural struggle and conflict (Gonzales, 2005).

Adolescent Mexican American Student Identity

Adolescence is a crucial period, a memorable stage in many of our lives, capable of lifelong influence and effect (Reed, Schallert, Beth, & Woodruff, 2004). Marked cognitive and intellectual changes occur; for preadolescents, “to think means to recall; but for the adolescent, to recall means to think” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 51). This is also a developmental period that can allow young people to experiment and negotiate between multiple identities (Alvermann, 2001). Seen as a the unkempt borderlands between childhood and adulthood, this period is fraught with socially constructed myths and discourses that preempt youths to live up to expectations of rebellion (Alvermann, 2009). Central to this concept, especially for purposes of this study, is the cultural relativism that permeates thinking on this age. As such, Alvermann (2009) found that:

(Y)oung Latinas who identified themselves at various points...as Mexican, Chicana, Tejana, Mexicana, and Mexican American demonstrated that their uses of popular culture and popular cultural texts could not be reduced to any one fiction (p.21)

Rather, we see dialogic constructions of ethnic identity (Schilling-Estes, 2004). At school, adolescent Mexican American students may even engage differently with various other ethnic minority groups (eg. Koo & Nishumura, 2013; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004), allowing a complex encounter and even synthesis of new cultural positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) beyond the Mexican-Anglo American binary, as their cultural identities become influenced by, while influencing, other minority cultures. Situated between and within these worlds, immigrant youths learn to manage their complex cultural selves at these multiple cultural intersections.

While in school, many adolescent Mexican American students revealed feelings of differential treatment from teachers, as one shared in Quiroz' (2001) study, "[teachers] ignore [Hispanic] students. They treat us Hispanics differently than they treat White people. They would rather deal with White people" (p.332). Mexican American middle-grade students can sense this aura of Othering that permeates their schooling experience, and this feeling of exclusion and subordination can lead to a depressed sense of hope in their futures.

Furthermore, in U.S. classrooms, these youths are assessed by "neutral instruments of school assessment [and by] standardized tests that were culturally alien to them" (Smagorinsky, 1995, p.202), that ignore their extracurricular and practical abilities. By bypassing their extracurricular funds of knowledge (Gonzales, 2005), schools overlook, and miss out on celebrating the full range of talents and abilities of these youngsters.

Despite these challenges, a phenomenon known as the *immigrant paradox* exists to describe the superior performance of such students academically (Aretakis, Ceballo, Suarez, & Camacho, 2015; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). In a study of early generation (foreign-born and children of two foreign-born parents) Latinx adolescents versus late generation (U.S.-born with only one foreign-born parent), early generation students displayed greater academic performance, despite marked disadvantages of less acclimation and less financial stability of their families. Early generation adolescent Mexican Americans may also benefit from a more pronounced sense of *familismo*, or strong family support and piety (Aretakis et al., 2015). Researchers have found "that *familismo* positively predicted academic achievement among second-generation Latin[x] students" (Aretakis et al., 2015, p.58). Adolescents with a greater sense of obligation to the functioning of their families tend to invest more in their schooling and are more highly motivated academically.

Aretakis and colleagues (2015) investigated the immigrant paradox among 212 Ninth-grade Mexican American adolescents in a parochial school and two public high schools in the Northeastern U.S. These students largely reside in poor, urban neighborhoods, and received free or reduced lunch. Students' sense of familismo was assessed by the familism value scale with an additional question from the Multiphasic Assessment of Cultural Constructs-Short Form, while the "Family Current Support" measured attitudes toward specific family obligations. Paired with student school-related behaviors, their findings indicated that a strong sense of familismo corresponded to greater academic effort.

Immigrant youth and adolescent Mexican Americans may shoulder a larger burden for the function of the family than most of their non-immigrant peers. In the U.S., immigrant youths have to behave differently, as they engage in age-relevant activities like dating and going to school, while simultaneously taking on more mature duties (Orellana, 2009). For example, one young girl in Stewart's (2013) study, in part, "has traded her mother, rural life, and regular sports activities for the responsibilities of an adult" (p.47). She is then both an insider and an outsider with regard to the typical U.S. adolescent culture (Knight et al., 2014).

Parents of first or second-generation Mexican American students tend to hold high aspirations for their children's educational attainment as well (Azmitia & Brown, 2002). Their understanding of education, however, exceeds the traditional White American understanding of academics to encompass moral development as well. They term this notion, *educación*, which embodies guiding students on the right life path. Adolescence is a critical time for this development, and parents of teenage Mexican American students often change their parenting principles as their children enter adolescence, and as they themselves acculturate more into U.S.

society. For example, their concept of familismo may shift to become more like the mainstream majority.

Researchers found that despite the fact that the increased sense of familismo corresponded to greater academic effort, still, by and large, “Latin[x] youth underperform on all measures of academic attainment” (Aretakis et al., 2015, p.63). Troubling still is the fact that successive generations even display decreasing academic achievements. From their study, Aretakis and colleagues also found in-group differences in levels of familismo with regards to countries of origin, with the Dominican and Mexican populations scoring highest in familismo. This demographic also exhibited the most heritage culture ties most likely due to the transnational nature of the community in the U.S. Thus, there may be disparities in academic performance and cultural attitudes even based on the Latin American countries of origin.

In particular, this sense of familismo is also what makes Mexican families units cohesive, and gives adolescent Mexican American youths strength as they navigate U.S. society (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). But, the Mexican family system is also prone to experience dramatic shifts when they begin their life in the southeastern U.S. In a study that involved twelve adolescents and fourteen parents from ten undocumented Mexican families in North Carolina, researchers found parents could not spend time with their children due to employment demands. In a series of open-ended interviews, the researchers targeted components that led to family stress, such as estrangement of relatives, social isolation, dangers in the community, and a decrease in family time due to occupational demands. As a result, many adolescents did experience tremendous isolation and anxiety, yet also felt greater responsibility and duty to their family. They often “worried about their parents’ vulnerability in the new cultural system and strived to acquire new cultural skills to help their families” (p.62).

Writing Adolescent Girl Identity

We live in a male-dominated world, and “women who speak and write in a man-made symbolic universe are women alienated from language” (Kamler, 2001, p.153). Girls must utilize a foreign set of symbols to express themselves, or they can be silenced, their voices finding no expressive means, veiled “in lack, invisibility, [and] silence” (p.156).

For adolescent girls, writing may be a natural outlet of expression in their quest to become adults (Shandler, 1999). In Sara Shandler’s *Ophelia Speaks*, she documents the writings of 56 different adolescent girls organized into five sections that address themes of body image, family, friendship, sexuality, and finally independence. The girl authors articulate feelings of self-hatred, envy, pain, grief, shame, and regret through caricatures of mothers, fathers, siblings, and friends. These writers use descriptive vignettes, poetry, diary entries, and memoirs to construct the experience of being an adolescent girl in the United States.

These girls hail from all corners of the nation, and range from ages of 13 to 18. Some of them are anonymous, but their voices are unmistakably raw and palpable. For example, one 16-year-old from a suburb in the East Coast wrote about her sister’s eating disorder, and feeling the ridges of her “vertebrae coming up out of her back” (Shandler, 1999, p.94). These stories are deeply empathic and full of emotion. In another piece written by Mireille Latoures Hyde, who is 16 from a city in the West Coast, is a journal entry entitled *Crush*. The piece describes her dissatisfaction and infatuation simultaneously, painting a complex tumultuous picture of this older guy. She describes her own insecurities artfully:

I hate that I am probably not what you want to want, one girl in a group of many, all in jeans and colored tank tops and Lash-by-Lash mascara, a girl who can’t decide between little-girl-cute and true woman’s beauty (ick), and therefore has neither (p.181).

In her space, she is painfully aware of what her partner desires and what she is, uncomfortably snug in the gap between the ideal and the real. The complexities of mature relationships and childhood realities co-create some of these girls' compositions.

These girls are searching for themselves, yearning for an identity. In Iris Martin Cohen's poetry, entitled "To Brook on Giving her my Favorite Book," the poet, a 17-year-old from a Southern city begins, "You know the real me?/That wondrous, true Iris that Cory is perennially searching for,/that phantasm of projected attributes – mysterious,/sophisticated-/elusive" (Shandler, 1999, p.235). She begins with questioning her identity, her esteemed "projected attributes," which she answers lines down, "Well, here it is, the *real* Iris,/and all that lay at the bottom of the seemingly endless/speculation/was this – an old, cheap, gray paperback./-a bit of letdown I guess" (p.235). The self-degradation may hint at a lack of self-pride or esteem, even when the projection is one of confidence. Thus, the multidimensionality of adolescent girls may be showcased in their writings.

Through these multiple girls' various writings, one can see the inchoate beginnings of a young adult, discovering her world, a world painted with the colors, imageries, thoughts, and vocabulary of an adolescent girl. Their words depict not only an image of the time, place, and persons in her world, but also reflect an image of the author, her voice emanating from her larynx. The reader can picture the author keenly, as the vibrancy of her language also constructs the author in detail.

In reflecting on writing, these girls may also be conceiving of their intentionality, agency, and a sense of self. As such, a girl in Barbara Kamler's (2001) study writes in a poem: "I was creating a fiction/and there were these scenes that would help/contain it,/I don't know how to explain this/but I knew I would build towards that end/and it would get the reader/and there was

a/sense/of/retaliation” (p.162). In writing, these girls develop an identity, not only through reflection but also through assertion of will and consciousness, working towards a desired change of both self and the world.

In fact, in studying such writing, we can see “the ways a writer’s personal experiences can be represented in text, in the shifts in subjectivity” that occur in the writing process (Kamler, 2001, p.47). In fact, writing about oneself is instrumental in constructing one’s identity, as language becomes a personalized “system of representation” (p.52), as writers “reconstruct and renegotiate their identities” (p.54). By writing from the first-person perspective, these girls are, as Kamler states, “relocating the personal” (p.ix) so that their subjectivities can be highlighted and their experiences prioritized as the framework for constructing and sharing knowledge. Writing a Mexican American girl identity is furthermore complicated, as for instance, Mexican culture typically views girls through the gaze of *marianismo* (Dennar & Dunbar, 2004, p.302), or the ideals of sexual virtuosity and maternal self-sacrifice. This view of girls may be at odds with some dominant cultural views, so that these young bicultural authors need to negotiate gendered ideals through writing. In the intersectionality of her identity, a girl’s gender is a significant and critical facet of influence (Núñez, 2014)

Writing a Mexican American Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity can be defined as “one’s overall identity focused on the values, attitudes, and behaviors of one’s ethnic heritage culture, and becomes particularly salient during adolescence as youth increasingly reflect on the meaning of their ethnicity and the role it will play in their lives” (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015, p.88). During adolescence, components of the Mexican heritage ethnic identity play a growing role in the overall development of a Mexican American adolescent. Indeed cultures outside the West have long used life narratives to express

their personal knowledge and shared their cultural and linguistic identities via writing, particularly the Mexican culture (Meléndez, 2007).

Currently, Mexican American students do generally perform below their mainstream culture peers in the U.S. on a wide array of literacy measures (Kim et al., 2011). For example, a quantitative research study conducted by Kim and colleagues (2011) has shown that “the poor reading and writing performances of [Mexican American students] in the middle grades persist through high school” (p.232). The researchers implemented the Pathway Project as literacy teacher professional development that included cognitive strategies in using on-demand writing assessments to help predominantly Mexican American mainstreamed middle and high school students understand, interpret, and write the academic essay. The efficacy of the program was tested in a multisite, cluster-level randomized controlled trial involving 15 secondary schools in the Santa Ana Unified School District in California. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies give these adolescent writers insight into their writing process, the thought patterns that gear their behavior, as well as offer strategies to sustain these endeavors.

They used pre and post-test on-demand writing assignments in the 50 test classrooms or those whose teachers attended the Pathway seminars, and 51 control classrooms where teachers did not. There were marked improvements in the post-test on-demand writing quantity and quality of those test classrooms. They found these Mexican American students required more guided instruction of reading and writing to help develop deeper thinking and interpretations, as well as delivering those cognitions through writing while mastering writing conventions.

These scholars claim that metacognitive skills help develop meta-awareness about the text, domain knowledge, knowledge about text attributes, and procedural knowledge to engage in literate activities. In tandem, writing, along with reading, has “the potential to contribute in

powerful ways to thinking” (Kim et al., 2011, p.234). These new mental activities facilitate “brainstorming, drafting, editing, and publishing (for writing)” (Kim et al., 2011, p.234), and so Pathway strategies may improve these Latinx students’ English writing ability.

Results from a follow-up study (Olson et al., 2012) show that treatment effects were replicated to an on-demand writing assessment, and data demonstrated evidence of improved performance on a standardized writing test for the students involved in the Pathway project. These results provide substantiation for cognitive reading and writing intervention strategies for middle grade Mexican American mainstreamed ELLs. Their marked improvement in writing assessments, though not sufficient alone as gauge, does support the need for such targeted programs in the literacy field.

Despite the numerous studies regarding Mexican immigration in recent years (e.g., García & Gaddes, 2012; Liu, 2013; Orellana, 2009; Sánchez, 2007; Valentino, Brader, & Jardina, 2013), there are still substantial gaps in research. In particular, the writing experiences of these youths (Cuero, 2009; García, López, & Makar, 2010) still need to be fully explored as a gauge of their acculturation. For example, Sánchez (2007) pointed out that their literacy experience “serves as an important lens into how children raised as transnationals see their own lives in relations to the mainstream narratives of family and home, and how they negotiate depicting a metanarrative about their community’s transnational experiences” (p.266).

Written productions by Mexican American students have specifically been analyzed to determine the extent of Mexican American ethnic cultural affiliation (Cuero, 2009; García & Gaddes, 2012; Honeyford, 2013; Quiroz, 2001). Their level of identification is reflected by their diction, grammar, and orthography, with some such students displaying a mixture of English and Spanish in their writing, perhaps manifesting a dialogic cultural and linguistic orientation

(Bakhtin, 1986; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The resulting product could actually be coded with a translanguage in both English and Spanish (García & Wei, 2014). Writing becomes a generative act that helps construct and affirm a transcultural consciousness.

The content of their writing showcases such a cultural interplay as well (Lu, 2001), and this cultural hybridity also transfers to their sense of self. At these complex nexus of transnational identity, there is “the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of indifference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (Bhabha, 1991, p.2). In this intersubjective, multilingual, transnational, intercultural space, cultural identity is not singular, static, or stable, but rather split, dynamic, and in flux (Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

Many transnational Mexican American adolescent immigrant students in the U.S. have different experiences and self-perceptions from their mainstream peers (Sánchez, 2007), and from other ethnic minorities as well. After school, many of these young people hold jobs to not only provide extra income for their immediate families (Orellana, 2009; Stewart, 2013), but often also for their extended families back in Mexico. They may even need to simultaneously act as caretakers for younger siblings and translators for Spanish monolingual family members. As the most competent English speakers in the family (García & Gaddes, 2012), many are counted on to negotiate with landlords, doctors, and school officials.

Academic discourse has recently addressed this phenomenon of writing these split identities (Cuero, 2009; García & Gaddes, 2012; Honeyford, 2013; McCracken & Ortiz, 2013; Quiroz, 2001). For example, in her research, Cuero (2009) studied three teenage female Mexican American students, who wrote their *formas de ser* (p.142), or *ways of being*, which in their early adolescence was dialogic. Early adolescence is now gaining more and more attention as a crucial

period in young lives, as middle school has become the time for tremendous tumult and change (Wallace, 2016). Through writing in dialogue journals, the girls learned to author individual, collective, and systemic identities, triangulating “her three major social spheres of home, peers, and school” (Cuero, 2009, p.143). Furthermore, these *formas de ser* were liable to shift with the context of their lives, inciting eclectic authorship.

In Quiroz’ (2001) study, she compiled 47 eighth grade autobiographies of Mexican and Puerto Rican students in Chicago, 27 of which were collected again during junior year in a predominantly Latinx high school. The school in which this study occurred consisted of about 2,900 students of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central American descent. The community surrounding this school was beset with high poverty, crime, and unemployment. In these narratives, Latinx students’ thoughts about family, school, ethnicity, and future endeavors are revealed through and coded in these youths’ voices. Unfortunately, however, schools usually file these pieces away without much heed, thereby silencing their voices. Perhaps, as a result, these students are often deemed “not quite ready” for advanced reading and writing assignments (McCracken & Ortiz, 2013, para. 3).

In these eighth grade and junior narratives, these students’ multiple positionalities are revealed (Hermans, 2001; Núñez’s, 2014), for example, as the family self, the student self, and the career self. In the Mexican students’ pieces, family was portrayed as a solid support network and source of comfort. The writings composed by eighth graders generally depict negative schooling experiences, yet most remained hopeful about their futures. However, by junior year, these Mexican American students’ narratives lacked any discernible evidence of hope, and many developed a mixture of self-recrimination and resentment toward their schooling experiences.

Contrary to this depiction, McCracken and Ortiz (2013) consciously rejected the deficiency characterization of Mexican American students in their study. Although they realize Hispanic students generally have lower self-efficacy and more apprehension regarding their writing, these scholars refused to view their students via the “rhetoric of lack” label (McCracken & Ortiz, 2013, para. 3), and introduced them to familiar texts and held their writing to rigorous academic standards. In the fall of 2009, ten instructors simultaneously launched 23 sections of a Writing about Writing (WAW) course, which pushed Mexican American college freshmen to compose writing from a position of conceptualizing the students as competent and able writers. The course offered guidance and perspective for the students, and worked to trouble any of their negative preconceptions regarding writing. They also collected a total of 337 surveys geared toward assessing student academic self-perceptions, as well as conducted interviews and observations.

The main focus of the program was geared towards building confidence and self-efficacy in these young writers. Prior to enrolling, this new type of class created anxiety, boredom, excitement, frustration, and feelings of being lost and confused. Through this course, these students painstakingly learned about the writing process, of editing and revising drafts, and to not be satisfied with the first attempt at a paper, “getting ‘used to the idea of a writing process, rather than a writing task’” (McCracken & Ortiz, 2013, para. 33).

These students learned about the complexities of the writing process, of synthesizing diverse strands of information from primary and secondary sources. They learned the importance of deep, critical thinking, and all gained confidence in academic written discourse. There was a focus on the affective experience of writing, and the development of a meta-awareness of the

writing process. The program also worked to bring students locus of control inwards, so they gained more initiative in their learning, and viewed themselves as scholars and writers.

Even though these students expressed their sentiments, their voices may still be silenced in U.S. society, much like the experiences of women (e.g., Arnold & Slusser, 2014, Clarke, 2008, Daub, 2009) and other ethnic minority populations (eg. Coombs, Park, & Fecho, 2014, King, 2006). Voice in this context is defined as “having power over the representation of reality and meaning, and the ability to construct, articulate, and therefore shape one’s experience as it is presented to others” (Quiroz, 2001, p.328). Incipient in these writings are attempts to mold a student identity by these youths, and how such constructions guide them to their futures.

In her research, Honeyford (2013) conducted a six month ethnographic case study focusing on one middle school Latinx student participant in a small town in the Midwestern U.S. The student’s one piece of multimodal narrative poem is highlighted. In analyzing this text, the researcher targeted how multimodal texts corresponded to expression of identity “visually and via documents and artefacts” (p.19). The poem was combined by the student with images procured from the Internet or captured with a digital camera. Then moviemaker software was used to layer the image with text. Analysis of these products was “through an iterative, multi-level process of multimodal discourse analysis” (Honeyford, 2013, p.19), focusing on the intersection of space and time.

Latinx participants’ writing often reflect cultural artifacts, and according to Honeyford (2013), we “hear the ‘doubleness’ playing in student narratives and acknowledge the work of representation as it is ‘constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth’ – not simply as powerful stories, but in the politics of their positioning” (p.18). They articulate their tales to stake claim to their identity. This double-voiced discourse serves and represents two separate speakers

simultaneously (Bakhtin, 1981), embodying both the heritage identity and the adopted dominant cultural identity. For students of Mexican American heritage, cultural tendencies, such as the use of magical realism and culturally-specific festivals such as Día de los Muertos and Cinco de Mayo were prevalent in their English writings (Honeyford, 2013). As such, these “students’ stories are infused with meaning that carries traces of their history with them” (Honeyford, 2013, p.18). Narrative writing both constructs and positions our cultural identities (Vertovec, 2001).

Honeyford (2013) found the act of writing also to allow the writer to transcend his spatiotemporal limitations in a conflagration of multiple simultaneities, that of space, time, and identity (. Her Mexican American participant, Gabriel, struggled with the dichotomous markers of his identity (good/bad; boy/girl), and imagined he was an angel who can transcend physical space. The diction he used often denoted a temporal or spatial dimension, as “he realise[d] the simultaneity of space, place and time as he imagine[d] himself freed from the boundaries of the spatiotemporal that locate him as an immigrant, ‘newcomer,’ or outsider in this community” (Honeyford, 2013, p.22). In such writing, evidence of cultural artifacts in immigrant student storytelling manifests their morphing cultural identities. Writing is a freeing activity that allows assumption of different positions, perspectives, and realities.

Finally, García and Gaddes (2012) conducted a study of adolescent Mexican American girls in an after-school writing program, and advocated a culturally-responsive pedagogy for their writing instruction, where ethnic differences and heritages are legitimized and honored. Their study followed a sociocultural perspective in studying 12 Mexican American girls, ages 14 to 15, who all displayed moderate Spanish fluency.

The study lasted from the summer of 2005 to fall of 2006, and data was collected in the forms of student writing notebooks containing “poetry, first draft narratives, reading responses,

exit surveys, and writing in response to specific writing prompts” (García & Gaddes, 2012, p.149). Culturally-relevant texts were provided as mentor texts to coax their own productions. The authors found that writing offered these adolescent girls a space to capture their hybridized culture “where two worlds collide and blend together” (García & Gaddes, 2012, p.159), or a dialogic construction of their genders, cultures, and identities (Bakhtin, 1986).

In their composition, Mexican American writers can engage in translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014; Hornberger & Link, 2012), whereby the individual alternates between two or more languages. By utilizing both English and Spanish, they can “combine and juxtapose scripts as well as explore connections and differences between their available writing systems in their text making” (García & Wei, 2014, p.67). In such ways bilingual and bicultural writers can use the full repertoire of their expressive abilities “to assume more linguistic flexibility” (Hornberger & Link, 2012, p.262) in presenting their ideas. In this way, their worlds may be composed utilizing the different palettes of their expression.

Writing Dimensions of Mexican American Culture

In particular, the writing of adolescent Mexican American authors can also capture aspects of their heritage culture (Quiroz, 2001). The dimensions of this culture can be partitioned into faith, family, and ethnicity, as these fragments of their identities may differ from the dominant mainstream context. Their writing of these facets of their being elucidates their hybrid selves (Bhabha, 1991), morphing and changing, moving with the pen via writing (Vygotsky, 1986).

Faith

A significant part of that Mexican American cultural identity may be their Catholic faith (Odem, 2004). This spirituality has not only given individuals in Latin America personal strength

during times of crisis, but also a collective identity that bonds people of the region. This faith can be expressed via their writing, manifesting as spiritual themes and the general solemn tone of the piece.

For example, in her study, Nadjwa Norton (2014) studied the hip hop writing of Latinx students, ages 7 through 13, in New York City. She noted spirituality as a major theme in their writing. In addition to collecting writing samples, Norton also conducted focus groups that met ten times, as well as two hour-long semi-structured interviews. The focus groups revealed how students wrote, listened, created, and performed pieces, as well as common themes like race, class, gender, and ethnicity.

The data for this research, both writing samples and transcripts, was analyzed in an iterative and recursive fashion. The data was coded for categories and themes, and then synthesized dialectically with theory, participants, and the community of researchers to elicit patterns, codes, and concepts with the relevant literature. For example, Craig, a 9-year-old Black Puerto Rican boy co-authored a song expressing his faith:

“Chorus:

Thank you God for letting us live

Each day you give me happiness

I always do what I have to do

God what’s next? What’s next?

We’re asking you what’s next?

Verse:

I’ll help you find a place to live

I’ll let your family call you

Give you some clothes to keep you warm

I'll give you one more chance

To do what you have to do

But you better do right

Before you go to jail and be in a cell

Chorus:

Verse:

Jesus, Lord help me

Get a job to help my family

Get food on the table

Let my family eat

A roof over my head" (Norton, 2014, p.342).

In this writing, the Latinx author speaks directly to God in a dialogue. God speaks back, assuaging him and assuring him that he is protected. He expresses his Christian beliefs as he speaks to Jesus directly. In addition, collective familial and socioeconomic class attitudes are also inferred, as this author asks God to look after his family, while God works through his family to assist the writer. Finally, the theme of incarceration of Latinx youths is also implied.

These instances of speech may later develop into writing, as gradually, "this intermediate link, spoken language, disappears, and written language is converted into a system of signs that directly symbolizes the entities and relations between them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.106). Written language, for the minority author, can at once sound hir voice to share with the world, characterizing hir unique identity development, and be the tool to convey thought to reality.

As such, Weinstein (2007) explored how adolescent inner city urban Mexican American girls expressed themselves through writing poetry, prose, and rap lyrics. Through their work, they constructed gendered and sexual identities. One of her participants, Marta, wrote this poem, and again, we see the preponderance of her spirituality:

“Dear Lord,
Full of grace
Bless my boyfriend’s cutie face
Bless his hair that always curl’z,
keep him safe from other girls,
Bless his eyes so green and nice
make them see the morning light,
Bless his arms so big & strong
make them stay where they belong,
Heavenly father from above
please protect the one I love,
Let him know & finally see
that the one who loves him is me.
Keep him Lord keep him 4 Ever.
But most of all keep us together” (p.42).

She composes and shares her religious beliefs, while declaring her affection for her boyfriend as well. Via these hip hop writing, intersecting dimensions of identity, like faith, family, and socioeconomic status conjoin (Núñez’s, 2014). When these authors perform these lyrics, these words then become even more living and vibrant (Bakhtin, 1981). They become the vessel that

gives their words more personalized voice, smitten with the vigor and passion that they imply. Both Latinx writers express their spiritual orientations, but also how different facets of their identities can intersect (Kamler, 2001).

Family

Family is also a significant factor of Mexican American identity (Quiroz, 2001). According to the Monterrey County Office of Education (1993), Mexican American students often write about their families. In this excerpt, the author writes about her grandfather in Spanish:

“A Mi Abuelo
El que siempre hablaba con sus amigos,
con todo la gente que conocEIA.
A veces yo sentia él conocía a todos.
El que me decía “Mi Duende”
Porque no podia decir “Wendy”
El tan fuerte.
A veces yo pensaba el no podía llorar.
Yo recuerdo lo que le gustaba más, ‘chile.’
Mi abuelita siempre le hacía chile.
Empezaba con una cuchara y de un trago se lo tomaba
todo” (p.68).

Translation: To My Grandfather

He’s always talking with his friends,
with all the people he knows.

Sometimes I feel he knows everybody.

He, the one who calls me “Duende,”

Because he can’t say “Wendy”

Is so strong.

Sometimes I think he can’t cry.

I remember what he likes the most, chile.

My grandmother always makes him chile.

He starts with a spoon,

then he ends up drinking it all.

The author writes completely in Spanish how her grandfather knew everyone in the world, and how he would mispronounce her English name. Thus, name and identity are poignant themes for these bicultural, bilingual youths. Her affection and admiration for her grandfather is apparent, and is artfully expressed in writing. She also writes about other family members in relations to her subject.

Perhaps the sense of *familismo* with which many first generation Mexican American immigrant youth identify may compel them to provide instrumental support for the family, which represents a prioritization of close familial ties, and lead to less risky, dangerous behaviors. As evidence of such family attitudes, one Mexican adolescent boy in Quiroz’ (2001) study wrote,

“My father was in the delivery room when I was born. My mom says that when my father had me in his arms tears started coming out of his eyes...My father is a carpenter, and when I grow up I want to be a carpenter just like him...My mom is great too. When I come home the house is always clean...I hope I marry a girl like my mother” (p.333).

Such writing reveals the strengths of family bonds and the positive family attitudes in many Mexican American communities, and a desire to sustain such relationships throughout the lifetime, though perhaps also perpetuating traditional gender roles. Through such writing, the young man authors his close family connections, even when, during this developmental stage, many mainstream dominant peers may rebel and dissociate from their families (Adolescence, 2013). However, not all Latinx communities have such attitudes towards family (Quiroz, 2001), as for those from Puerto Rico, for instance, family connections are not always as prioritized.

Even with such national discrepancies, there may still be a greater focus on the family among Latinx adolescents on the whole as compared to mainstream dominant culture peers in the U.S (Aretakis et al., 2013). For example, a Puerto Rican student in Quiroz' (2001) study wrote fondly about how her family influenced her cultural identity:

“I am from the beautiful island of Puerto Rico. I was naturally born here in Chicago but my family has taught me my heritage and to be proud of what I am and where I’m from. Puerto Rico holds a lot of memories and with all those memories there is a lot of love” (p.335).

Evident in this excerpt is how families can connect Latinx students to their heritage, inciting fond memories that are full of love. Family in this context not only represents a personal social identity, but also a larger heritage or racial identity, passing along heritage traditions and “memories.” Perhaps a collective memory of an entire culture can even result from sharing and passing on of such stories (Bikman, 2013). Family can be a poignant motif in Mexican American students’ writing.

Ethnicity

The last dimension in Mexican American student writing is ethnic identity (García et al., 2010; Quiroz, 2001). I also include linguistic inclinations in this category as a reflection of their cultural affiliation, including practices of translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2010), or code-switching between vernaculars corresponding to distinct ethnicities. In fact, this ethnic subjectivity then “manifests itself in autobiographical terms as a vast set of individual and collective ‘I-narrative’ stories that arise from the imperatives of a post-contact and postcolonial moment” (Meléndez, 2007, p.152). Through written composition, these youths may be able to pen that identity.

For example, in Ivey and Broaddus’ (2007) study, they identified 14 Mexican American seventh and eighth graders, and evaluated their writing. A constant comparative methodology was conducted on research debriefings of educators, frequency counts of participant reading and writing, as well as reflective writing regarding these instances of literacy. The writing products of the students were sometimes composed in both Spanish and English, perhaps both sides of their ethnic orientation.

In this writing, a Mexican American writer uses two languages as evidenced in this sample,

“El man esta inside the hause y hay one animal down the rug. The man queria kill the animal. He levanto the chair y throw the chair. The man curious. No sabia lo que happened. Get up the rug discover one scorpion” (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007, p.536).

In this excerpt, the writer fluidly meshes two languages lexically and grammatically, as with blended Spanish and English sentences, vividly mirroring morphing linguistic, and perhaps

cultural, identities. For example, there are the omissions of the verb in the fourth English sentence and of the subject in the last English sentence, which are ungrammatical in English, but are common occurrences in Spanish grammar (Shin & Montes-Alcalá, 2014). In this excerpt, the author weaves two linguistic repertoires, each representing a part of his or her construction of the world through language. Here, the English may correspond to the White ethnicity of the dominant culture and the Spanish corresponds to the heritage Mexican culture of the author. This author translates thought processes into the written word, characterizing and describing thoughts into two languages.

To others, their Mexican ancestry, in addition to being a linguistic repertoire, may be a source of pride, an ancestral balm for an inchoate cultural identity. A young Mexican American author wrote this piece painting his Mexican heritage:

“I learned
Spanish
from my grandma
mijito
don’t cry
she’d tell me...
my grandma
wore moons
on her dress
Mexico’s mountains
deserts
Mexico’s oceans

In her eyes” (Monterrey County Office of Education, 1993, p.70).

Here, the author expresses her Mexican heritage and ethnicity, honoring both the Spanish language and the Mexican terrain in beautiful poetic diction and imagery. Additionally, her grandmother is described as the source of that cultural pride who personifies both the Spanish tongue and the Mexican landscape, thus also reaffirming her family connection.

In such ways, the Hispanic and indigenous ethnicities of the Latinx writer may manifest through writing about warm memories and childhood nostalgia. The writer’s words may capture the diction, colors, and imageries of youth, and be transmitted to the reader in the twains of his heritage. Ethnicity may be conveyed by the particular writing style of the minority author (Canagarajah, 2010). Mexican American students’ writing, especially dialogue journals written in their heritage language, reveals much into the psyche of the writer (Cuero, 2010). One young female writer made sure her facts were accurate, that her writing was tapered to her audience, and proofed and edited her Spanish-English bilingual writing. She also “used visualization...to rekindle vivid memories [so] her own writing served a personal experiential purpose that allowed her to re-experience a fond and/or salient memory” (p.432).

So, via the writing of these adolescent Mexican Americans, these three facets of their identity are clearly derived. As these writers gain fluency in their second language, they become more adept at conveying their identity, and may even hold a deeper, more complete understanding of who they are. It is evident that pedagogy taking into account their cultural reference “that connect to students’ personal lives can also promote meaningful engagement and academic literacy development” (Enright, 2010, p.807).

Writing about Border Crossing

However, these dimensions of identity perhaps could apply to immigrants in the U.S. from any culture or nation. A Mexican American consciousness differs in that there may be an additional narrative that distinguishes this culture from others- that of the crossing (Collins, Villagran, & Sparks, 2008; Montes & Rodríguez-Valls, 2008). Narratives of traversing the southern border of the U.S. pervade the collective conscious of both those in Mexico, and those who have crossed over. Currently, the number of unauthorized immigrants in the South even exceeds the total number of African Americans living in this region during Jim Crow (Marrow, 2010).

This ordeal of immigration is etched in the collective consciousness of those who cross over from their homelands and of their families (Groody, 2014). Latinx adolescents often write about this shared cultural trauma, manifesting perhaps a collective memory of this most visceral event in their transition to this country. For example, in Sánchez's (2007) study, one Mexican American youth, Carlota, recalled in a prewriting session: "When we came out, they checked our car; they like hella hit it on the top to see if we had drugs or something...He was like walking through the interior of the car and I heard banging. Then, we were in San Leandro [close to home]" (p.270).

Mexican American students may recall such visceral memories or family narratives in their daily lives. Such emotions of anxiety and relief can be used to situate the author in being a powerful correspondent of the event. One young Mexican American author wrote about his father's experiences crossing over from Mexico. In his narrative, he recounts the dangers of his father's and others' journey, before "the injustices, discrimination, culture, and language changes

they encounter” (Monterrey County Office of Education, 1993, p.79) in their new home as immigrants:

“When they crossed the river, they began to swim for a quarter of a mile in the dark, swimming against strong currents of the long river. At this time the cold brown water was so strong that they ended up about one mile down the river from where they started swimming.

After they made it ashore, they wanted to rest a while, but it was impossible....

After the fifth day, when they didn’t have any food, they had to hunt animals to feed themselves. There were times that they didn’t have any luck, and they would have to eat grass, cactus, and wild berries, or even sometimes just drink water....

Now my father is living here. He has a house, a car, and a job. But still he is not satisfied with everything...in the ‘Land of Opportunities.’”

Detailing and chronicling the physical and psychological hardships of such an ordeal in writing allows the Mexican American culture to keep a record of the journey many attempt each year.

Sharing such tales within the culture strengthens the bonds of cultural membership, and with others outside the culture, such writing can engender greater cultural understanding and empathy of the immigrant experience (Ngo, 2008).

Writing Magical Realism

The writing of Mexican American youths may also incorporate culturally-inspired modes of descriptions, such as magical realism (Schroeder, 2004). In Latinx literature, the effect of magical realism has always been pervasive (Cox, 2009), from Gabriel García Márquez’ *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, to Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*. For students of Latin American heritage, cultural tendencies, such as the

use of literary devices like achronological time with magical realism, and themes like culturally-specific festivals such as Día de los Muertos and Cinco de Mayo were prevalent in their English writings (Honeyford, 2013). As such, these “students’ stories are infused with meaning that carries traces of their history with them” (Honeyford, 2013, p.18). Such narrative writing both constructs and positions our cultural identities (Vertovec, 2001).

Honeyford (2013) found the act of writing also to allow the writer to transcend his spatiotemporal limitations in a conflagration of multiple simultaneities, that of space, time, and identity. Her participant Gabriel struggled with the dichotomous markers of his identity (good/bad; boy/girl), and imagined he was an angel who can transcend physical space. The diction he used often denoted a temporal or spatial dimension, as “he realise[d] the simultaneity of space, place and time as he imagine[d] himself freed from the boundaries of the spatiotemporal that locate him as an immigrant, ‘newcomer,’ or outsider in this community” (Honeyford, 2013, p.22). In such writing, evidence of magic liberates the narrative dimensions in immigrant student storytelling manifesting their morphing cultural identities.

The subsequent three stories are pronouncedly heritage, as well as being hybridized versions of European and native indigenous folktale, and may serve as mentor texts for Mexican American writers. The stories of La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and La Malinche all embody a distinctively Mexican aura while peppered with European flavors (Hall, 2006). Together, these can then become guiding texts for Mexican American writers who also personify this transnational consciousness in the United States (Vertovec, 2007).

La Llorona

One of the most famous examples of magical realism in Mexican culture is the story of La Llorona (Herrera-Sobek, 2008; Leon, 2004), or The Weeping Woman. The story originates in

Aztec legends, and tells of a woman named Maria, a native with a European Christian name, who drowns her babies to be with the man she loves. However, the man refused her love, and so in grief for what she sacrificed, Maria drowned herself in a river. At the gates of Heaven, another incorporation of the European Christian element, she is stopped and is forced to find her children's souls before entering. So, the woman's spirit wanders the earth in search of her children, crying in vain, "Mis hijos, mis hijos! (My Children, my children!)"

So, La Llorona, though a tragic and pitiful figure, is also selfish and murderous (Leon, 2004). She is both to be pitied and hated, creating a tragic villain figure with human frailties. This cultural narrative can be used by adolescent Mexican American writers as a mentor text to create their own literate productions (Hall, 2006). Especially, during Halloween or Días de los Muertos, this legend can inspire dark, frightful texts written by Mexican American authors. In doing so, they share not only their words, but also a facet of their culture.

Virgin de Guadalupe

Another figure of prominence in Mexican culture is the Virgin of Guadalupe (Herrera-Sobek, 2008; Moffitt, 2006), as a spiritual figure for the Mexican American community. Her appearance to the local peasant Juan Diego, as the transnational Christian symbol for the Virgin Mary, is miraculous and sacred, personifying the Biblical narrative for many Latinxs, making the religion more relevant and relatable for locals. She was said to have appeared four times at the foot of the Hill of Tepeyac, and even impressed her image on Diego's cloak. She also asked for a church to be built at the site in her honor.

The Virgin has since become a role model for women, a source of solace for men, and a strident symbol of regional spirituality, the source of inspiration for countless written and artistic texts (Herrera-Sobek, 2008). The story of the Virgin is a culturally hybridized narrative that may

resonate with similarly culturally hybrid immigrants (Bhabha, 1991). She is at once a symbol of deep European cultural influence and an instance of indigenous pride. In writing inspired by this figure, this persona of indigenous spirituality may also be “a feminist figure challenging patriarchal society and as a political icon signifying social justice for the poor and oppressed” (Herrera-Sobek, 2008, p.310). As such, young Mexican American girls may use her as a source of strength and inspiration in narrating their own lives, and asserting their marginalized identities within the dominant culture.

La Malinche

The third figure in Latinx culture that may inspire the textual expression of Mexican American youth is La Malinche (Herrera-Sobek, 2008), or Doña Marina, the story of a native woman who became the lover of Cortes, and who assisted the Spaniards in pacifying the native peoples, thereby consolidating Spanish hegemony in the region.

She is painted alternatively as a victim of Spanish conquest, the personification of treachery, or as the mother to the new Mexican people. In another instance of ambivalence, this figure is also caked with complexities, who not only is a positive cultural figure, but also an villainous symbol of treason and betrayal. She simultaneously embodies a mestizo identity or consciousness that represents the European colonialization since 1492, yet also signals the re-subjectivization of the indigenous population to be authors of their own personal and cultural narratives (Meléndez, 2007).

Today, the story of La Malinche can be inspiration for textual expression by Mexican American adolescents, who may also experience the complexities of being loyal to the heritage culture while embodying the host culture (García & Gaddes, 2012; García & Wei, 2014).

Transnational Mexican American writers may position themselves from different cultural

perspectives in their writing, and capture the dual subjectivities and linguistic repertoire that define their beings.

Together, La Llorona, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and La Malinche all act as symbolic figures of the complex cultural positions of Latin America (Herrera-Sobek, 2008), and perhaps also those of Mexican American adolescents in the U.S. These cultural stories all incorporate dimensions of the multiple cultures of Mexican heritage, and synthesize them with spirituality and magical realism (Cox, 2009). These texts may also act as inspirations for self-concept for Latinx youths as well.

Discussion

As expressed above, Mexican culture is hybridized and complex, simultaneously indigenous and European, and both starkly visceral and fantastically magical. Adolescent Mexican American authors work to capture this multidimensionality and multilingualism in their writing, using both Spanish and English, utilizing all the cultural experiences and languages at their disposal (García & Gaddes, 2012). Their writing may be equally as complex as their authors' cultural affiliation, and reading such works may require a more heightened cultural awareness (Sarmiento & Vasquez, 2010).

When Mexican American authors who are adolescents compose texts, they may leave indelible marks on their page that chronicles their changing, growing sense of self and the world. The words they use may capture both their multitudinous sense of identity and the visceral process of arriving to their new home (Núñez, 2014). As they write their narratives, poems, essays, and songs, hints of their past sully the page marking it with the earthen hues of their cultural heritage, those stories, languages, and understandings of a time that may have seeped into a collective unconscious.

Recent research implicates the difficulties in teaching academic writing to Mexican American students (Quiroz, 2001; Ybarra, 2004). Mexican American students may “not only see (such instruction) as confusing, but also see this as a hostile attempt to change who they are” (Ybarra, 2004, p.4), as further colonial conquest. However, when Mexican American authors are encouraged to write their identities (Cuero, 2009), who they are and who they aspire to be, in their own voice with the languages they feel the most comfortable with, then perhaps they are able to discover themselves and their academic trajectory. Perhaps writing instruction needs to emphasize how “one can draw not only things, but also speech” (Vygotsky, 1987, p.115), thereby validating students’ voices devoid of the influence of standardized writing conventions.

When important markers of their identity, their religion, their family, and their ethnicity are the topic of writing assignments, there may be greater investment and more pronounced evocation of personal voice. When folktales are allowed and encouraged to act as mentor texts, their writing holds deeper meaning, touching the roots of their existence. These dimensions may capture the fundamental elements of Mexican American students’ beings, and so being able to compose and share these facets can help such students excavate these fragments from within, helping gain metaperspective on their identity.

Furthermore, class discussions about border crossing may assist these students in understanding the journey they have been on, literally, and allow them to describe and convey this experience figuratively to others. Writing about such personal experiences can perhaps encourage a more authentic voice. However, the current reality in U.S. schools is that writing pedagogy focusing on formulaic structures and unidirectional logic frequently “does epistemological violence to Latin[x] students because of marginalization and cultural implications that take place” (Ybarra, 2004, p.4).

In stark contrast with the achronological time sequence and magical realism, the three part (introduction, body, conclusion) standardized academic essay may be culturally invasive and another example of the White U.S. cultural model. The indigenous “cultural backgrounds of Latin[x] students that involve what might be described as circular discourse patterns is not easily translatable into the tripartite structure” (Ybarra, 2004, p.12), and by demanding one voice in text, “the stress on singular identities is culturally confusing and emotionally disconcerting for students [who] operate under a multiplicity of identities” (p.12).

Indeed, there may be a hegemony of one singular perspective (Bakhtin, 1981), a unitary language that undergirds fundamental writing instruction. This type of focus misses out on the multitudinous indigenous voices and understandings of cultural minorities (Correa, 2010), like Mexican American students. Perhaps we need to shift the entire frame of our writing instruction, so that it incorporates the many frames of reference for understanding writing and understanding the world. In this way, not only are Mexican American students more culturally invested in their learning, but dominant mainstream classmates also are introduced to another perspective.

Literacy education for these Mexican American students not only serves as a way to describe who they are (Cuero, 2009), but also taps into the rich cultural reservoirs to serve as inspiration for the composition of their lives and complexities (Núñez, 2014). These cultural texts that have been altered by European Christian influences are altered once more as they transact with Mexican American adolescent audiences who brings hir own idiosyncratic understandings and experiences.

The richness of linguistic, sociocultural, temporal, and spatial simultaneity and heterogeneity provides adolescent Mexican American students with a unique perspective (Honeyford, 2013), a distinctive voice that embellishes our society and academic landscape.

Through their written texts, these individuals are able to dialogue with the world (Bakhtin, 1981). Perhaps composition is the mediated activity between thought and symbol. Language and the written word become a medium, a template, and indeed, a palette with which to color their word.

Conclusion

Adolescent Mexican American girl students, pulling from the diverse strands of their being, attempt to describe and shape a world in which they may feel voiceless and powerless. By understanding the literacy behaviors of this population, those minorities who undergo this transformative age may be more able to utilize literacy as a resource and as an academic facet. Through the numerous studies described in this chapter, such multiple Mexican American identities are shown to construct and reconstruct themselves on paper, sharing their images with the world.

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**CHAPTER 3: GROWING UP IN AN UNDOCUMENTED
MEXICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILY⁵**

⁵ Zhou, Xiaodi. To be submitted to *Migration Studies Journal*

Abstract

This article describes the growing up experiences of one early adolescent Mexican American girl in an undocumented family in the rural southeastern U.S. She engages in heritage cultural activities along with dominant cultural traditions. Through such endeavors as translanguaging, she narrates the heritage stories of her life mixed with U.S. majority culture traditions. She engages with two cultural contexts in her daily life. Utilizing Anzaldúa and DeChaine's ideas of bordered cultural identity, this paper details the narrative inquiry of this girl's literate and cultural experiences.

Keywords: early adolescent, Mexican American girl, undocumented family, bordered cultural identity, translanguaging, narrative inquiry, literacy

Growing up in a Undocumented

Mexican Immigrant Family

Maria, a fourteen year old Mexican American girl from an undocumented family, lived in the rural southeastern United States. She identified as Mexican, but there were also many instances wherein she engaged with the majority culture in her life. In order to study her cultural identity and lived experience here in the U.S., I conducted a narrative inquiry via an idiographic case study for the past three years in the context of her community (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Levy, 2008). Fourteen years ago, she crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in her mother's belly, and was born a few months later in the U.S. after her mother, Isabel, arrived in this country. Maria had heard on many occasions throughout her childhood about how her mother risked her life to cross that border. Somehow, Isabel survived her ordeal that night. With the determination and resolve to give the unborn child inside of her a better life, she undertook the harrowing journey from the fields of Michoacán north through the desert of northern Mexico, across *la frontera* (Davis, Deaton, Boyle, & Schick, 2009; Groody, 2014), or the bordered region between Mexico and the U.S., through the underbelly of Texas and Louisiana, and into the dense forests of the Southeast.



Figure 3.1: Rigoberto A. Gonzales (2014). “Tierra de Nadie (No Man’s Land).” Matt Gonzales Collection. Smithsonian, Washington D.C.

Twelve years later, in the U.S., the child in her belly that night grew into an early adolescent girl. Now in middle school, that child, Maria, had heard Isabel tell her about that night many times in Spanish. One day, she struggled to relay the same narrative to me in English:

I don’t know how to tell you. Oh my Gosh, I want *her* to tell you, but I don’t know how you’re gonna type it [because it’s in Spanish]. But, the dog was barking. And, then they went into a church, and *they* couldn’t go into a church. Those were the people who she went with through the border, and then she saw the church, and then they were cold at night. Outside on the roof of the church was a glass painting of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, you know, the mother of God.

Yeah, stained glass. That was the first thing my mom saw. Like, I think she felt safe when she saw that. And then the next morning, *el padre*, the priest, he's like, "You should have told me- you should have knocked at the door, so I could give you a sweater or blanket." But, then the priest was really good. Yeah, and then so this person, they call him the coyote, *el coyotaje*, or something like that. I don't know how my mom says it, but she says it funny. And then he [the coyote] took them [Isabel and her fellow migrants], and they had to pay him, because he's the one that pays them [others in the chain of smugglers]. She actually ran from 8 in the morning to 7pm. She said she had to go through the cold water, and she had to hide under a bridge, and the mosquitoes were like- like that. And, she was only wearing a tank top. (Interview, October 20, 2014)

This story, and others about Mexico, were told and retold to Isabel's children. I wanted to study the effects of the living context on my participant's cultural identity. The three research questions I had for describing Maria's cultural positioning were how was her developmental age culturally expressed in her observations, interviews, and writing. Next, how did her community and neighborhood influence her cultural identity? Lastly, how was her identity positioned politically, culturally, and linguistically?

Theoretical Framework

In Maria's case, her cultural identity was influenced by both the heritage Mexican culture and the dominant U.S. culture. There is an ambivalent sense of citizenship that characterizes the notion of self-identity (Anzaldúa, 1987), which may be influenced by both family and societal factors. Cultural identity development, especially for ethnic minority individuals from immigrant families in the U.S., does not necessarily mean "a linear process of assimilation leading

immigrants to acquire host society's values and behaviors and implying the disappearance of the original culture or ethnic identity" (Devos, 2006, p.382). Rather, there is a dialogic, bidirectional influence by both the dominant culture and the heritage culture (Bakhtin, 1986).

A girl or woman from an immigrant Mexican family is often "[a]lienated from her mother culture, 'alien' in the dominant culture, [so] the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 42). Her ambivalence between and within both ethnic cultures causes her identity to also be bordered between these two cultures in her life (DeChaine, 2012; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). There are actually differences between children and parents in their senses of culture or acculturation, as the strong sense of familism found in Mexican families may even erode in time, with each successive generation.

Scholars have pointed out the cultural incongruities between Mexican immigrant children and their parents and community, and have hypothesized on the effects such inconsistent engagements of cultural perspectives can have on the younger generation (e.g., Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007, Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007). One's heritage context marks certain notions of morality and frames of cultural reference with which to gauge and monitor behavior within the community. In such ways, "a view of the rhetorical powers of borders and their power in the public discourse marks an important shift in focus: from borders to *bordering*" (DeChaine, 2012, p.3, emphasis in original).

These individuals' bilingualism and biculturalism also affect their identity (García & Wei, 2014). Through such practices as translanguaging, or "speakers' construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of language" (p.22), bilingual people engage with a plurality of cultures as well. Although the dominant host culture and language also interacts and transacts

with these home communities, heritage world frames conveyed through heritage languages largely characterize the perspective of these locales. Here in the U.S., such individuals “can potentially live transnationally without having to sever ties to their countries of origin [and maintain] linguistic and cultural practices that may have been lost in past immigration” (Sánchez, 2007, p.260).

Translanguaging “refers broadly to how bilingual students communicate and make meaning by drawing on and intermingling linguistic features from different languages” (Hornberger & Link, 2012, p.239). The practice involves the dialogic synthesis of distinct language contexts coming together to form a single hybridized language system with elements of each independent language system (Bakhtin, 1981). This notion in literacy education views the languages of bilinguals “not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 2). This one system is hybridized and manifests two linguistic consciousness and conventions.

Many of these individuals need to “negotiate meaning for a wide array of people” (Orellana, 2009, p.8). In being skilled in two vernaculars, they regularly engage in transience between English and their home language, translating for monolinguals in both the English-speaking world and their heritage context. These translating responsibilities frequently necessitate engagements with the adult world, and in “their positions as *para*-phrasers, immigrant children are powerful social actors” as well (p.77). So, such individuals traverse cultural, linguistic, and developmental borders, each with unique definitions of power.

Method

In order to investigate Maria's cultural positioning as expressed via her literacy, I conducted a narrative inquiry of my participant's life and how her literacy experiences interacted with her lived cultural context (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). The methodology I employed was a single case study that lasted for three years (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I utilized this method because of my "interest in the *local particulars* of some abstract phenomenon" (pp.2-3, emphasis in original), namely how the cultural positionings of one Mexican American girl in an undocumented family in the southeast U.S. influenced and was influenced by her literacies. This case study was idiographic in nature in that I sought to "describe, explain, or interpret a particular 'case' and which [could] be either inductive or theory-guided" (Levy, 2008, p.3).

Data Collection

As a cultural outsider (Merriam et al., 2001), I had gained rapport and the trust of the community as a counselor at the neighborhood clubhouse for a year before the study. During this time, I got to know Maria, and found she was suitable for my research. I was the sole researcher, as I conducted twelve recorded one-hour-long semi-structured interviews spanning the course of three years, from March 2014 to March 2017. During this time, I also observed her familial interactions and literacy behaviors. I collected 182 pages of observation notes on freehand, composed 104 pages of interview transcripts, and garnered 112 pages of writing, 81 of them digital and 31 on paper. I password encrypted all writing and audio files and saved them onto my desktop.

One-hour-long unstructured observations (Mulhall, 2002) occurred at her home on days of interviews. Such observations at times involved me as a complete participant to other times a

complete observer. I member checked the observation notes with my participant afterwards on the same day (Roulston, 2010). I noted her interpersonal interactions, and wrote down some of her speech. I used thick descriptions to characterize the cultural and social context of her behaviors (Geertz, 1994).

The hour-long interviews at her home were semi-structured (Flyan, 2005), wherein I had a general direction of the dialogue, “but the conversation [was] free to vary, and [was] likely to change substantially” depending on my participant’s responses (p.65). I asked a series of questions⁶, and they were audio-recorded via Audacity software on my laptop as MP3 files. Transcription followed conventions (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999) and transcript files were password encrypted.

Ongoing during my visits was also the collection of her writing, which she shared both digitally and in hard-copy. Four digital writing samples were emailed to me. For the rest of the school writing samples, she shared her class Google Drive. I chose to study in depth 39 pieces of school assignments spanning fifth to eighth grades. I obtained six typed assignments of free-verse poetry. Other writing included 24 fictional narratives, ten personal narrative pieces, five essays about her neighborhood, and two poems. These pieces were around 150 words each. Finally, I also assigned four short one-paragraph writing responses to prompts, such as “How do you feel about Donald Trump⁷.”

Analysis

Ongoing during data collection were analyses of these three forms of data. The processes spoke to one another, each influencing the coding and interpretation across data sets. I coded my

⁶ Refer to Appendix 1 for sample questions

⁷ Refer to Appendix 2 for data collection chart

observations according to themes I drew from the interview transcripts, and vice versa. In reviewing the data, as I sorted through the narratives of my participant, both written and spoken, her stories began to “invoke the process and tensions often present in gathering data” (Dickson, 2011, p.85). I used the software ATLAS.ti to identify narrative themes in my transcripts, writing samples, and observations, and used an open coding system (Frieze, 2014).

The transcripts of the twelve interviews, totaling 104 pages, were coded for narrative themes (Reissman, 2005). These themes were then associated with the dominant U.S. culture or heritage Mexican culture, or another minority culture. The themes in her speech were member checked with my participant to confer with her the accuracy of the codes (Roulston, 2010). In an iterative analytic design, I repeatedly looked over previous data sets when new codes were found, and modified and recoded prior data (Yin, 1994). I coded the observation data first, then the interviews, and finally the writing. I used a thematic narrative analysis of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In her writing, I also looked at diction, language (e.g., English or Spanish), and themes, and drew connections to her heritage culture or the dominant U.S. culture. For example, I attributed elements of magical realism and heritage fables in her writing to her Latin American cultural background. Her writing about the history of U.S. slavery or about Disney characters was more consistent with her U.S. identity. Also her use of Spanish was tied to her Mexican heritage, while her use of English connected to her education and life in the U.S. In such analyses of my data, I was able to pick out certain text, speech, or behaviors that spoke to a particular idea or to a particular research question⁸.

⁸ Refer to Appendix 3 for sample coding chart

Subjectivity Statement

My identity as the researcher may have confounded my interpretation and analyses of my participant's behavior and writing. We had distinctions that may compromise my understanding of her. First, we were of different genders and ages, as she was an early adolescent fourteen year old girl and I was an adult man in his mid-thirties. Next, she lived in a heritage Spanish-speaking community and I had lived in mostly majority culture English-speaking contexts during my time in the U.S.

We came from different socioeconomic and familial documentation backgrounds, as I grew up in a middle class professional family with a single mother who is a naturalized U.S. citizen with a doctorate degree; her family's socioeconomics were lower and her parents were undocumented laborers without advanced formal education. I never had to worry about whether my family would not have enough money to live or that they would be deported. She was also the oldest girl of five children, and I was a single child. Due to our age difference, I had also had more formal schooling.

Due to these discrepancies, some of her behaviors, utterances, and writings may have been misinterpreted. Because I am Chinese American, I may not have been as tuned to her Mexican American culture as a mitigating factor. Because I am a male, I may not have been as sensitive to the impact of her gender on her lived realities. Due to my age, I could have also missed addressing key factors in her adolescent culture. Due to my language deficits, I also did not sufficiently analyze her Spanish writing for cultural and linguistic influences. Because of these deficiencies, I needed to avoid impressionistic interpretations of my participant and focus more on support from the actual data itself.

Findings

In interviewing, observing, and collecting the writing samples of Maria for three years in her heritage community, I had noticed how her cultural identity had been affected by both the dominant U.S. popular and political culture, as well as her community's Mexican culture. It was evident that the particular narrative described earlier had become a part of Maria's family's narrative as well, its collective history that was shared among members. She told me:

And every day I think about how my mom told me the story about her crossing, about her having to live all this, and about me seeing the news. It's hard. It also made me cry. This didn't happen to me, but I imagine my mom crossing *here*, having her having to live this. (Interview, October 20, 2014)

Maria's ability to empathize with her mother, to truly understand her thoughts and sentiments, gave her a stronger sense of her Mexican identity. Additionally, by bringing up the news on Univisión, Maria also integrated current events regarding immigration she saw with her own life story.

In her home here in the U.S., there was a bronze plated plaque of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico (Herrera-Sobek, 2012), hanging high on the wall in the living room. There was one particular picture of a grinning Isabel clutching a much younger Maria's chubby cheeks close to her face. With her treacherous border-crossing experience as context, where kidnapping, rapes, and murders were common (Didelot, 2014), I could understand Isabel's sense of elation holding her daughter in the U.S.

During one of our conversations, Maria answered when I asked if she felt like she belonged in this country: "Sure, I was born here but I'm not sure about being a citizen and stuff like that because I don't know. I think I'm a citizen. I'm not sure. I was born here. My mom was

pregnant with me and she came here to have me” (Interview, July 26, 2014). The other girl in my pilot study also was in utero with her mother on her trek, a common experience, I discovered, for many of the families.

“I am Mexican. It’s in My Blood”

With this narrative of Isabel’s crossing, the story passed down from mother to daughter, Maria psychologically shared in her mother’s journey. This was why whenever I asked her how she identified culturally back when she was younger, she would often answer hastily, “I am Mexican. It’s in my blood.” The border-crossing narrative was a part of her consciousness, as well as that of many other children like her (Groody, 2014; Sánchez, 2007).

Mexican immigrants first began migrating to the U.S. in earnest in the early 20th century due primarily to labor demands in the U.S. and political unrest in Mexico (Zong & Batalova, 2016). The flow has followed four main waves. As of 2015, there were about 35.8 million U.S. residents who identified as Mexican or have Mexican heritage, making them the largest heritage of Latinxs⁹ in the nation. In fact, today, the U.S. is the home to the second largest number of Mexicans, second only to Mexico itself (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

A parentified child.

Today, many of these individuals and families lived in isolated communities across the southwest and in parts of the southeast (Marrow, 2013). Isabel’s sacrifices as an undocumented immigrant made Maria appreciate her mother’s love, and also her own tentative place in this country. Where the family lived now was a small enclave community of other Mexican immigrants on the outskirts of town.

⁹ van Horne’s (2016) gender neutral referent to people of Latin American ancestry

Most here were day-laborers or custodial workers and toiled without benefits or compensations. Her stepfather acted as the main bread winner for the family. In one interview in which she described her stepfather's role in her family, she confided:

I mean like he's more a dad than my real dad, because he actually helped us out through *a lot*. He's like, "Don't worry. I'll get everything done." But, that's why he works two jobs. He wants to make sure we don't miss anything, where we have all we need. But, he's like the best present that my mom could ever give me, because he actually helped me come out of my shell, because he helped me with what I need. He actually supported me at my graduation. But, he couldn't support me on my presentation on Thomas Jefferson, because since he worked two jobs. He was actually restless. I was like, "You can actually rest." Like I feel we were abandoned by my real dad, with my stepdad coming out to help us (Interview, July 26, 2014)

Her stepfather was there at her elementary school graduation, which meant a lot to him, since neither he nor Isabel ever graduated elementary school. When Maria looked down into the audience, she saw her stepfather's teary eyes, which she had never witnessed before. This excerpt was coded as U.S. school culture along with Mexican family culture.

Another important family narrative that Maria experienced personally was the birth of her younger brother, whom she calls *Capullo*, meaning *caterpillar* or *cocoon*. She told me that immediately after he was born, he was wrapped in blankets like a caterpillar in a cocoon. She was very close to Capullo, and functioned like a surrogate mother to him, at times feeding him, bathing him, and making sure he stayed out of trouble. She wrote a piece about the day he was born, titled "The Birth of my Heart's Missing Piece":

I just entered a semi-dark, clinical room. I started to walk over to my mom to see how she feels being in this hospital. My mom tells me, “Did you see him?” “Who?” I asked. “There.” Then I saw a figure, as small as a little owl. When I stared into his eyes, I saw waterfalls, rain, rivers. I saw nature. His eyes were as black as a night sky. Then they can look like a lost person. Then, I look at my mom. She looked as pale as a ghost. (Oct 2, 2014)

It was clear her brother’s birth was a significant event for Maria, coded as Mexican family culture, in the magical way she described that day.

In her family, Maria took on more adult responsibilities. On one day when I visited her, she was standing in the kitchen in front of *el comal*, or a shallow oval-shaped skillet for making tortillas, tending to dinner. She learned to make tortillas out of cornmeal from scratch from her mother, who learned it from *her* mother when she was younger, as the tradition was passed from generation to generation, from mother to daughter. In fact, consuming tortillas was a practice that predated the Spanish conquests, originating from Aztec traditions (Morton, 2014). Making tortillas was one way Mexican Americans connected with their precolonial roots. I coded this observation as Mexican family culture as well.

She at times even treated her younger siblings in a motherly, parental style. Here she talked about taking care of her brother when he was younger:

Like, we tell him to get a diaper when we change his diaper, and he goes gets it.

And, he gets the little wet wipes. And then I change his diaper. And then when I finish changing his diaper, I put it in the...your know where they put the diaper in a ball...And, he got it, and he threw in the trash. I’m like, “Go get this.” And, he just ran and goes gets it. (Interview, June 27, 2014)

So, in addition to taking on translation responsibilities, she also functioned as a surrogate parent. She had an authoritative demeanor in her household, and made many of the decisions for her younger sisters, like when they needed to come inside and when they should go to bed. In describing her two younger sisters, she would gripe:

They're like the most annoying sisters in the world. And, now instead of getting more mature, they're getting even *more* annoying. They're *worse* now. They never help out with cleaning the house. They don't pick up after themselves. I have to do everything. They cry so they won't have to clean. Like, it's so annoying. (October 5, 2016)

Maria described her sisters as immature and irresponsible, and how they played games to get out of chores. Her qualm with them was less with them actively irritating her or fighting for their parents' affection, but more with them not taking on their responsibilities for the maintenance of the household. In this sense, she took on a more motherly position, and less of a sibling rival role.

Not only did Maria help with childcare, food preparation, and upkeep of the house, but also with legal and financial matters. She told me:

I need to call the Food Bank every month and tell them what we need, how many people we have in our family, and stuff like that. I also need to translate for my parents when they need to go the bank and about the stuff on the news about the laws here so they know what we need to do. My uncle in Mexico is planning on crossing soon too. He's gonna try. He might try to come next month (Interview, October 5, 2015).

She was the surrogate parent, the parentified child (Orellana, 2009), with whom the parents needed to discuss adult issues because she was the oldest English-speaker in the family. For example, after Trump's election, the family discussed with Maria their options:

I think they're joking about it, but they said we might move to Canada. They were just joking about it. My dad had said to not panic, because we don't know what's gonna happen. We have to wait until Trump comes in, and see what he does. 'Cuz on the news we heard that he's gonna only take like criminals. (Interview, November 16, 2016)

So, she needed to know these adult matters, because she was often counted on to deal with the English-speaking adult context through which the family needed to navigate. I coded the four prior transcripts as indicative of Mexican cultural affiliation.

In Maria's literate tendencies, I saw her assume hybridized cultural leanings. For example, she liked the fantasy genre in literature typically with White characters, gravitating towards books like *The Hobbit* and *The Hunger Games*. When I asked her what made *The Hunger Games* so appealing for her, she noted it was the family dynamics:

I liked how the main character stood up for her little sister because she didn't want her little sister to go to the games. So, I liked that part. And, I liked how she was brave to fight for what she believed. And she also killed the president of District 13, because she dropped the bombings in the capital, because it was to find the capital. And she bombed it, and her little sister there, and her little sister got dead (Interview, June 16, 2014).

What Maria connected with most in this text was how the protagonist stood up for her younger sister, because she herself had sisters whom she must stand up for. Even though the heroine was

an adolescent White girl, Maria still identified with her, because of similar sibling dynamics, and standing up for one's family was also a big part of hers and her heritage culture's identity (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). This was coded as White literary culture with elements of heritage culture in the significance of family.

Despite sometimes expressing her irritation with her sisters, she still defended them in the face of outsiders. For instance, her younger sister and another older girl had once gotten into an argument, and decided to have a fight to settle it. Soon, Maria realized her sister was going to lose, so she jumped in and pushed the other girl off. She recounted the conflict in an interview on October 20, 2014:

So, two days ago, this girl wanted to fight my sister. My sister was laughing for some reason, but she thought she was laughing about her. So, she was like, "I'm not afraid of you. Let's go fight!" So, my sister was like, "I don't really wanna fight, because you're gonna start crying and all that." And then she's like, "I'm not going to cry. I'm gonna beat you up." ... She was just hitting her here and here. So, my sister hit her back, and she went like that, and I'm like, I got her head, and I went like this. I got her head, you know, pushed her head back. Like down.

This was an instance of her defending her sister when she was being bullied by others. In many Mexican households, this sense of familismo characterized much of the behavior of individuals (Aretakis, Ceballo, Suarez, & Camacho, 2015), thus I coded this excerpt as Mexican family cultural influence.

In addition to taking care of her brothers and cooking, her other household responsibilities included washing dishes, doing the laundry, mopping the kitchen, and calling the Food Bank. She

must also form as the liaison between her parents and me and the other teachers at the clubhouse, translating our exchanges. Maria regularly interacted with English-speaking landlords and school officials, placing phone calls and communicating for parents and other adults. She did all this because her command of English was the most advanced in the family. These added responsibilities caused her identity within the family to be bordered between child and parent, between English and Spanish, and between the U.S. and Mexico, as displayed by the contingent presence of both U.S. and Mexican cultural codes in analyzing such descriptions in observations, transcripts, and writing.

Community and neighborhood.

The community in which Maria lived functioned as extended family for her. The children in the neighborhood regularly went to each other's houses. Although the neighborhood was in the southeastern United States, the over-arching feel was unmistakably Mexican, and more specifically Michoacán. For example, the few times that Maria's stepfather was at home, he could be seen sitting on the couch watching Liga MX, the Mexican soccer league, on TV, following Michoacán's own Monarcas Morelia club, while nibbling on a plate of green strips of avocados garnished with onions and peppers, a traditional Michoacán snack. This observation was coded as Mexican culture.

Maria's community was from a specific region with its own indigenous cultural past and linguistic ancestry, one related to the Andean language of Quechua (Méndez et al., 2006). In recent years, the rural southeast had been a new destination for migrants from Michoacán mainly due to its carpet-manufacturing (Davis et al., 2009) and food-processing industries (Marrow, 2013). Because of its large concentration of Mexican residents, the Anglo population sometimes even referred to one such southeastern town as "Little Mexico" (Bautista, 2009, p.43).

I wondered when Maria felt her own heritage culture the strongest, and when I asked her, she replied:

Like holidays, when we celebrate Día de los Reyes, That's like the day of the kings of Mexico, the three kings of Mexico that found the site of them. We celebrate that by having this piece of bread, and each of your family member gets a piece of the bread, and if you get a little toy, that means you have to do a good deed for the whole family. And, we also have hot cocoa and stuff like that. And another holiday that we always celebrate in Mexico, we also celebrate La Día de los Muertos. It's kind of like a Halloween festival. Mostly, we celebrate it a lot in Mexico... like a festival, or something like that. Also, on Christmas, there's two people – Mary and Jesus, and Joseph...so they go around all the houses in Mexico, and they ask for the people to go with them...They have a piñata, and they have a party to celebrate Christmas, because Christmas is when Jesus was born. (Interview, June 16, 2014)

I could see the intersection of religious festivals and celebrations as facets or manifestations of her cultural identity, with several Mexican cultural codes, including the Spanish language. Indigenous celebrations of La Día de los Muertos were mixed with more U.S. holidays of Halloween, along with Christmas and the Day of Epiphany, or Día de los Reyes Magos (Sosinski, 2014), holidays celebrated in both cultures. Maria also described the holiday of La Posada when the Mexican tradition is to walk around the neighborhood with Mary and Joseph to a house with a piñata (Espinosa, 2011).

During Día de los Muertos in Mexico (Dakin, 2016), narratives like La Llorona were commonly retold to children (Herrera-Sobek, 2008). These tales were hybridized culturally

between indigenous Mexican elements and European influences. Maria recounted to me the time her mother told her this story:

She told us about this story in Mexico about *La Llorona*. Have you heard the story about that? OK, so once in Mexico, there was this lady. And she had her babies. And she had mental problems, so she started doing a lot of crazy stuff like that. And, so they were on a lake. They lived on a lake. She took her child, and was like, “Come, let’s go. Let’s go to the lake.” And, so while they were looking at fish and stuff, while they were looking at the water, the lady pushed her kids, and *drowned* them in the water. And *killed* them. So, that’s why she went crying. And, then she went to you know the church. She had a confession to make about her children. And God’s like, “Well, you shouldn’t have done that.” And stuff like that. And, she just ran to the lake and looked and looked for her kids. But, she couldn’t find them. They were all dead. And, so they *say*...if you’re by yourself at that lake where they died, you hear someone yelling, *crying*, actually, “My children. *My children*.” Now you know the story of the lady. (Interview, June 27, 2014)

In this tale, themes of family and parental love were mixed with allegory and religious allusions. In the legend, the weeping woman, or La Llorona, was met by God at the gates of Heaven. Since the story was told to her in Spanish, she had to translate the narrative into English for me. I coded this narrative as Mexican cultural influence.

Additionally, there was intersection between her lived reality and that of the story. Due to hearing her mother’s recount of her own journey to this country, and stopping at a church after the ordeal, Maria made La Llorona also stop at a church. The boundaries between stories that she

had heard and her own creations blurred, and fictional and relayed lived narratives became hybridized (Bakhtin, 1981). One lived reality were the holidays, like New Years and Christmas, celebrated in unique ways more in line with Mexican traditions. One such New Years' tradition was eating twelve grapes, one for each of twelve wishes, as soon as the countdown to the New Year began (Galicia, 2013). Maria spoke to me about this celebration at her house:

On New Year's Eve, every time it's a new year, we go outside, and we wait for the count down and it's a new year. My whole family, we have a reunion at my auntie's house...and the little kids have grape juice. And the older people have wine, and they have grapes. How many grapes you eat is how many wishes you wish. Last year, we didn't do a celebration, because my mom couldn't come to my auntie's house because it was really crazy here...My mom didn't want them to come because she thought they were going to get hurt...So, I spent it by myself. I was crying because my mom wasn't there then. We did the countdown that wasn't the same. And, the grapes weren't that good. And so, we didn't do any wishes. The grapes were like sour, they were nasty. (Interview, June 16, 2014)

Evident in these traditions was also the importance of family togetherness, of being with loved ones and sharing such moments. This excerpt indicated the importance of family for her. Also, her description that "it was really crazy here" and how her mother feared for her relatives' safety also conveyed a sense of danger and trepidation about her community. Important in her relay of these holidays was the communal, shared aspect of these celebrations.

Living between borders.

As an early adolescent first-born daughter with undocumented parents, Maria lived in between boundaries. Her identity may be bordered (Anzaldúa, 1987; DeChaine, 2012), between

childhood and adulthood (Orellana, 2009), being in between Mexican and U.S. traditions, being a U.S. citizen living with undocumented parents, and navigating a Spanish-speaking community within an English-speaking context. For instance, she told me about an incident one weekend after the 2016 Election when she was in town with her family: “Yeah, at Walmart this past Saturday with my family, this lady, this white lady, she just walked right into me...like *pushed* me, and then gave me this real nasty look, like she was disgusted or something. She was like really mean. It made me feel bad” (Interview, November 16, 2016). In the excerpts in this section, there was this bordered coding of U.S. with heritage elements, as operationalized by bordering culture color codes.

There was also the developmental border partitioning childhood and adulthood. On any day, she feared that her mother, stepfather and two young toddler brothers would be taken from her. She told me:

That’d be really scary. I think about that every day, when I leave for school, if I come home and don’t see my parents, I’m going to be really scared, knowing that we’re gonna be by ourselves. (Interview, November 16, 2016)

With such fears and anxiety, I wondered how Maria could actually focus on her study at school. In fact, her parents have talked on numerous occasions about leaving her and her next oldest sister, also in middle school, alone in the U.S.

The next border was political, between the U.S. and Mexico. In fact the reality of deportation was much too close for Maria and others in her community. She became very irritated by Trump’s depiction of Mexicans as drug-dealers and criminals. She relayed to me what happened to the father of a friend in the neighborhood:

No, they didn't catch him. He's in jail right now, or he's in Mexico. Yeah, he's probably in Mexico. Did I tell you that he had drugs? I mean that's what's scary. I was really disappointed because I feel that like now the stereotype that Trump is making is true. It's scary...it's *really* scary, Mr. Xiaodi. 'Cuz there are people that do it, and they live right across from us. They do meth and stuff, and they live right across from us. A kid could be riding their bike and see that, and they could follow right into their footsteps, making the stereotype bigger, you know?

(Interview, November 16, 2016).

This transcript was coded as Mexican culture encountering the dominant U.S. culture. There was a sense of frustration that some Mexicans did in fact conform to the negative stereotype spread by Trump. But, she also saw her own stepfather and others close to her as diligent and law-abiding, and felt saddened by the fact that there were other Mexicans in her community who did conform to the pejorative portrayal.

After Trump's inauguration, and faced with the real possibility of being left alone here in the U.S. with her sister, she told me: "I don't want them to go without us. I want to go to Mexico with them, so I would probably have to start over in school. So, school doesn't really matter that much for me now" (Interview, March 8, 2017). Maria no longer called me to help her finish her homework or prepare for tests.

She also wished the US government or the first Black president would do more for people like her and her family. For example, she explained to me her disappointment with President Obama:

But, the thing is I think, I know it's not good to say it, but I think Barak Obama's kinda cruel, 'cause I mean if he loved all his citizens, he would at least let some

immigrants come here in the U.S. That's what I think. That's what I think about every day. And every day I think about how my mom told me the story about her crossing, about her having to live all this, and about me seeing the news. It's hard. It also made me cry. This didn't happen to me, but I imagine my mom crossing *here*, having her having to live this. I know he's our president, but at least give them some sympathy. He should care about everyone. I mean, what if no one let his ancestors come to this country? (Interview October 20, 2014).

I coded this excerpt as Mexican culture meeting the U.S. culture. She laid the blame on restricted immigration of Mexican immigrants solely on President Obama and cast his ancestors as immigrants as well.

There were multiple cultural borders in her life, common among Mexican Americans (Anzaldúa, 1987, DeChaine, 2012). In reality, her neighborhood did not consist solely of Mexican residents. There were a few African American and White families who were neighbors, and the university-run clubhouse also had White, Black, Latinx, and Asian student and faculty volunteers. Additionally, there were also linguistic boundaries in her daily life, going to English-speaking schools and coming home to Spanish-speaking parents and neighbors. Also, the Food Bank often brought people of non-Latinx heritage to the community. These volunteers were mostly monolingual English speakers, and needed the help of children like Maria to translate for them. She even told me once, "I speak more English than Spanish. So, sometimes I just start speaking in English with my parents. Yeah, sometimes they don't understand me" (Interview, June 16, 2014).

Discussion

I take a dialogic approach to analyzing Maria's stories, both oral and written (Bakhtin, 1986), taking note of particular themes and patterns of expression (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The language used both in her actual expression and her opinions of the vernacular impact the tone and offer insight into her cultural attitudes. Issues of space and geography are also salient themes in her stories.

Maria's experiences in this country, in her community and family, where her multiple cultural and linguistic memberships and positionalities intersected (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), caused her cultural identity to be multiple and disparate. Yet, even though she was able to empathize with various different ethnic cultures in her life, from African Americans to Asians to White people, there was an underlying Mexican identity about her. This part, in her own words, was "in her blood," a visceral, primal sense of the world.

Even as I tried to elucidate her hybridity and identify points of intersection between her heritage sense of the world and the dominant culture, she asserted a deep connection to her Mexican self. I did not see equal parts of a U.S. perspective with her Mexican perspective, for even though she communicated primarily in English, she was often positioned from a Mexican framework. Even in her bilingual transactions with language, her perspective, for the large part, continued to be Mexican, from a heritage viewpoint. Her family and community have provided a basis for the heritage progeny for her cultural schemas as well as both an inspiration for expression and a forum for enacting her majority cultural productions.

So, much of her identities were not free-flowing, but rather bordered (Anzaldúa, 1987; DeChaine, 2012). She straddled what may be perceived as two developmental identities to cultural outsiders, that of a child and that of an adult. Her identity was an "*intersticio*"

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p.20), or the “space between the worlds [she] inhabited,” both politically and socioeconomically. She regularly engaged one world using English, and with others in the home community, she interacted mostly in Spanish. She was also on the border between two cultures, that of her heritage Michoacán culture and the dominant southeastern U.S. culture. She was privy to two cultural narratives, heritage tales passed down by adults in her community, and the Disney and U.S. popular culture narratives she saw on television and in movies and books, but the two were rarely mixed or hybridized in her expressions. Maria’s family and community have provided a distinct perspective about her world, one that was bordered with the dominant culture of her larger context.

Her cultural and linguistic contacts, from television shows, music, and even the news, remained with strong Michoacán Mexican and Spanish elements. She did watch many Disney and Nickelodeon shows also, as well as U.S. movies. At times, she also watched CNN, and commented how the portrayal of Mexico and Trump was slightly different in the U.S. than what she heard on Univisión. As many facets of her community and home life, from experiences at school to the afterschool clubhouse, to those with her family at home, to her transactions with literacies and with current events, intersected and conjoined in her being, Maria dealt with multiple alternating perspectives. As her literacy and sense of the world developed and shifted throughout the years, the influence of her heritage culture had become more salient and explicit.

Maria’s sense of culture had been hybridized so that such a mixture had become normalized to her. Like the story of *La Llorona*, the heritage and European Christian elements were so mixed that such hybridity had come to define Mexican culture for her. But, as time went by, U.S. immigration policies and the rise of political antagonism to Mexican immigration

(Wang, 2016), as well as her personal experiences in the community, made her more aware of the social climate against people like her and her family.

In her more recent verbal expressions, she took on a more Mexican orientation. Her cultural dialogue was lately less a *Schwellendialog* (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 111), or dialogue on the threshold between two cultures, but orientated more deeply in her heritage Mexican culture. Even though she was born and raised in the U.S., and had never set foot in Mexico, her cultural orientation was, at least in many aspects, from a Mexican perspective as evidenced by her words and perspectives. Yet, there were salient U.S. elements as well, from her love of U.S. pop culture and English young adult fiction to eating at the Chinese restaurant in town, to engaging in Halloween activities at school and at the mall.

The most palpable aspect of her heritage cultural identity for her, she confessed, was the numerous Mexican celebrations. They were put on by adults in Mexican American communities to remind themselves of their past and to pass on their traditions to their children (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). It was evident that these celebrations were intimately tied to Maria's own cultural consciousness and orientation, as she indicated it was "when we celebrate holidays and stuff" that she felt most Mexican. Such activities anchored immigrants and children of immigrants to their heritage culture, and assisted in nurturing a shared sense of belonging and identity. In fact, "practicing these traditions and rituals helped them preserve their Mexican cultural identities, their histories, their sense of familism, and ethnic pride even as they experienced stress and pressure to assimilate from social systems outside their homes (p.63).

Another way her cultural identity was developed was through the sharing of indigenous folktales and cultural narratives, like *La Llorona* or *La Virgin de Guadalupe*, traditional Mexican tales retold to children by adults. These narratives wove indigenous elements with colonial

themes, encompassing Mexico's colonial story with motifs of magical realism and the suppression of a native voice. Verities such as loyalty to family above fleshly desires and the significance of Mexico as a sacred, special place for religious manifestations were passed on.

Through sharing such oral communal stories, as well as those stories of her own creations, Maria engaged in dialogue with her heritage identity (Sánchez, 2007). She brought heritage cultural elements into her present life and context, such as her writing of her brother's birth. She existed amidst these stories, even as she lived in her own (Merriam, 2002), from the story of her mother's entry into this country to her own daily struggles in her social, familial, and academic lives.

Her roles as the first-born daughter also conformed to Mexican traditions (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007), as she was counted on to act as caretaker and surrogate parent, as well as assume more adult responsibilities (Orellana, 2009). Her bordered life, between childhood and adulthood, compounded with her adolescent identity, hurrying her maturation even as childish elements existed and sometimes manifested, or were otherwise suppressed. She was a *de facto* adult in the family, in taking more mature responsibilities for its wellbeing. Even still, she still behaved as a child, at times pouting when we needed to conduct interviews or casting her sisters as "evil sisters who are the most annoying sisters in the world."

Her cultural and linguistic orientations had at times been fluid and transitory, as she navigated the multiple realities in her life (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007, Orellana, 2009). To her, Mexico and the U.S. were actually not as separated and partitioned as they were in geopolitical terms. When she woke up in her home, turned on the television, or went to the neighborhood convenience store, her heritage culture and language were salient and visceral. When she left the community for school or went on excursions into town, she entered a new

culture and linguistic context. However, there were intersections and elements of each in the other, as was characteristic of a true dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981).

Dialogue of Languages and Cultures

When the children attended school, they brought their heritage language and ways of viewing the world with them to their classes, to transact with majority culture classmates, teachers, and staff. Whenever students returned home, they brought the language of schools, U.S. English, and the southeastern U.S. culture back to the community. The children's English utterances and dominant cultures transacted and encountered their parents' Spanish and Michoacán heritage, and sometimes their engagements were bilingual in both languages. As a consequence, many of the adults were also becoming bilingual, at least able to comprehend spoken English. It was no wonder that often times these youths' compositions were also in two languages to capture this mixture of vernaculars (Skerret, 2012).

Through her bilingual narratives, Maria strove to "break down the artificial dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual [allowing] multilingual individuals to integrate social spaces (and thus 'language codes') that have been formerly practiced separately in different places" (García & Wei, 2014, p.24). Translanguaging extended beyond mere hybridity theories to the awareness of the aggrandizing complexities involved in such individuals' sense-making regarding their world. Each language involved not only a distinct set of grammatical and phonemic structures, but also nuances in diction and parole tied to its unique cultural and linguistic contexts and histories (Saussure, 2011).

Underlying her mother's border crossing story was the link between language fluency and the accuracy of meaning (Blommaert, 2005). Because Isabel narrated her first-hand account to her daughter in Spanish, Maria had to translate her words from her own Spanish understanding

into English when she relayed it to me, losing some of the veracity in her recount (Gollan, Weissberger, Runnqvist, Montoya, & Cera, 2012). Maria spoke native-like English, at times with a slight Southern accent. Her bilingualism presented as an important aspect of her identity. In fact, it was this particular ability to speak both Spanish and English that functioned as a clear source of pride for Maria and others like her (García & Wei, 2014). Her engagement with translanguaging in this particular narrative was quite apropos, because the practice also implied the notion of space, “where geographical imagination [could] be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered...to be incompatible, uncombinable” (Soja, 1996, p.5). As she moved between these languages, she also strove to move between these bordered spaces with their different cultural perspectives.

Her language use was indeed tied to her cultural positioning, and multilinguals’ like Maria “use of different codes is performative in nature, allowing multilingual individuals to ‘create alternate realities and reframe the balance of symbolic power’ in interaction” (Back, 2013, p.384). The underlying tone and aura of the narrative was affected by the register, and disparities in meaning were impacted by the language, and its associated symbolic power, as negotiated through dialogue with others. The family was slowly becoming bilingual, with her younger brother learning to count in both English and Spanish by watching YouTube videos on the family’s iPhone.

In fact, in her relay of her mother’s crossing narrative, there were several Spanish words, such as *el padre*, the priest, and *el coyotaje*, the migrant smuggler. Even though the entire piece was originally Spanish, Maria left a few words in their original vernacular to emphasize their distinction with the approximate English translation. *Padre* was a title for a priest in Mexico, and this figure had particular importance for Mexicans for social activism (Saad, 2013). Indeed,

padres in Mexico often actively opposed social injustices and the plight of the disenfranchised. His presence in the narrative connoted a more critical tone. Also, the word *coyotaje*, meant hired smugglers who often take women and children across the border for a fee (Vargas, 2014), and were distinguished from traffickers, who transported people against their will and likely exploited them thereafter.

English language proficiency was a key factor in the family's identity (Blommaert, 2010; Weisskirch, 2005). She had even recounted with me about how her stepfather and her mother would engage in English-speaking contests to decide whose pronunciation of English was better. The children served as the judges, listening intently to contests which usually result in a tsunami of laughter. Maria's cultural identity may have been interlaced with her linguistic identity so that one way she articulated her dual ethnic cultures was by wielding both English and Spanish. The family negotiated their world in both languages, but, at times Isabel did get very frustrated as she struggled to respond to her children using English. Thus language must be analyzed dialogically with its sociocultural context as Maria recontextualized words produced by different authors as well as for her different intended audiences (Blommaert, 2015).

Her bilingualism, not only as manifestation of her transnational, multicultural identity, also presented as a marketable skill. In fact, when I first asked her what she would like to do in the future, she answered, "I was thinking about being a translator, but I mean...I would like to be a translator" (Interview, July 26, 2014). So, because she translanguaged and engaged in bilingual negotiations daily (García & Wei, 2014), Maria thought she would have enough expertise and practice in the prerequisites of being a translator as her profession in the future. In acting as a translator, she engaged and traversed languages and cultures, bridging two ways of seeing and naming the world. This relatively unfettered movement contrasted with her mother's harrowing

venture to this culture; yet, her present bordered lived reality also mirrored that rigid physical boundary Isabel traversed.

Each afternoon, children in her neighborhood brought various dominant cultural products, from Disney lunchboxes to U.S. young adult texts crammed in book-bags, to the Nike and Reebok apparel they wore, to the English slangs they spoke or the U.S. pop songs they sang. They brought with them U.S. cultural and linguistic artifacts to transact and interact with their home realities. It was this tension that was captured in Maria's voice, this lived reality that was sometimes mixed with diverse languages and notions of the world.

I see what was occurring in this quiet, unassuming locale as also what was happening in the larger world. With effects of the intense globalization experienced currently, languages and cultures transact at unprecedented rates (Blommaert, 2010; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Many languages are struggling to preserve their purity as diverse factors expand its singularity. Many individuals now juggle multiple vernaculars and notions of the world. As personified by Maria, perhaps people of the future are no longer tied to one solitary geographical region or culture, but can flow between and amongst different linguistic and cultural consciousness. Nevertheless, there is a counterpoint to this dialogic momentum, as there have also been efforts to standardize and monopolize languages and world views in this country to counteract diversification and globalization (Beyer, 2002; Sacks, 1999).

Conclusion

Maria sat outside next to her door on the wooden chair with a large crack along the edge, her legs kicking forwards and backwards, the dust rising and curling around her. She focused her glance down at her red iPad, and dragged her fingers along its hazy, cracked screen at pictures she had taken around the community. There was the clubhouse with the bookcase against the

windowsill and the communal garden in front of the building which she helped plant. Her favorite photograph was the colorful mural of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the wall of one of the residential buildings deeper inside the neighborhood, with her younger sister kneeling in front of it, head down, eyes closed, and hands folded in prayer. On each side of the Virgin were identical blocked tenements, each with a green roof and a brass-colored door.

“Ven ahora!” Maria shouted to her brother who was rummaging through tall blades of grass from across the street. As he hurriedly scurried over carrying a battered doll, her outfit muddied by play, he jumped into Maria’s lap. She held him close to her cheek, and I was reminded of that picture of Isabel clutching a young Maria. Her family and community provided a basis to view her context, supplying a language with which to ground cognitive schemas and notions of the world. Maria’s parents and siblings were truly important to her, and the current immigration climate threatened their unity, or at least their collective existence in the U.S. As she had grown and learned more about her world, she found it fitting to engage her heritage voice in offering a contradiction to stereotypes or negative assumptions made about her community.

In the current context, Maria engaged and transacted her heritage cultural identity with that of her lived host community. At school, in stores, and at restaurants, she became just another Mexican child to the casual outside observers. But, within her, countless idiosyncratic legends and languages existed together to articulate her being and constructed her complex sense of self.

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Appendix 1

Sample Interview Questions:

What kinds of family activities make you feel most Mexican?

When do you feel most American?

What is a typical day like for you?

What are some chores you need to do each week?

Talk about your stepfather's role in your home

You mentioned your mother had to cross the border, can you talk about that?

How do you feel about your sisters?

What about your brothers?

Talk about your reading experiences (What kinds of books do you enjoy?)

Talk about your writing experiences (When do you do most of your writing?)

Appendix 2

Table 3.1: Chart of Data Collected from March 2014 to March 2017

Data Type	Unstructured Observations	Semi-Structured Interviews	Writing Samples
Data Quantity	182 pages of fieldnotes	104 pages of transcripts	96 pages of writing (12 pieces of bilingual poetry)
Data Format	Behavioral notes in heritage culture and dominant culture settings	Recorded in Audacity and transferred to Express Scribe	66 digital 30 hardcopy
Examples	“Flea Market, April 10, 2016, with entire family”	“Mother’s border crossing”	Free-verse poetry
	“px eats @ restaurant gorditas con pastor, orders in Spanish”	“And she just ran, and they didn’t caught her”	“When will I live a better life?”

Appendix 3

Table 3.2: Sample Coding of All Data Types

Data Type	Unstructured Observations	Semi-Structured Interviews	Writing Samples
Coding Pretenses	Behaviors that are common to a particular linguistic or cultural identity	Talk data pertaining to a certain cultural orientation	Written content that related to a particular cultural identity
Examples	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watched Mexican soap operas on Univisión 2. Spoke in English to me and to 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Retold the narrative of <i>La Llorona</i>, The Weeping Woman: “She told us about this story in Mexico about 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wrote about the history of slavery: “Why am I treated like this? Just because I’m black?”

	<p>her sisters</p> <p>3. Made and ate tortillas with family for dinner</p>	<p><i>La Llorona.</i> Have you heard the story about that? OK, so once in Mexico, there was this lady. And she had her babies.”</p> <p>2. Recounted the border-crossing of mother: “She actually ran from 8 in the morning to 7pm. She said she had to go through the cold water, and she had to hide under a bridge”</p> <p>3. Talked about the need for a woman president: “I feel like there should be more women in politics. I’m gonna run for president”</p>	<p>2. Wrote about fan-fiction of Disney’s <i>The Little Mermaid</i>: “So I dived in the ocean and swimed to where the mermaid was and I was right! It is a mermaid. Not only a mermaid but it is Airel the mermaid princess.”</p> <p>3. Wrote about life in her neighborhood and the activities, foods, and people: “<i>From the bells of the paleteros ringing in the afternoons, urging kids to buy the paletas to the sizzling meat on the grill.</i>”</p>
Analysis	Coded behavioral notes for heritage cultural or dominant cultural behaviors based on language	Coded for instances of Mexican and U.S. cultural influence in her daily life and in the stories she tells	Coded for evidence of majority cultural or heritage elements from social studies, pop culture, current

	and cultural behaviors and traditions.	orally based on Mexican cultural references and Spanish language use.	events, and daily life
Codes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mexican cultural affiliation 2. U.S. cultural affiliation 3. Mexican cultural affiliation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mexican cultural affiliation 2. Mexican cultural affiliation 3. U.S. cultural affiliation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. U.S. cultural affiliation 2. U.S. cultural affiliation 3. Mexican cultural affiliation

CHAPTER 4: COMPOSING HER GROWING IDENTITIES
AS A MEXICAN AMERICAN¹⁰

¹⁰ Zhou, Xiaodi. To be submitted to *The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*

Abstract

This paper addresses the cultural positioning of one early adolescent Mexican American girl from the rural Southeast as reflected through her writing. Her literacy is a dialogic encounter of southeastern U.S. English with Michoacán Mexican Spanish in translanguaging text. Using Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) ruminations about the dialogic encounter of cultures, as well as García and Wei's (2014) concept of translanguaging in writing, this paper describes the development of a cultural identity as evidenced by writing, particularly the use of language, genre, and themes. Her cultural affiliation is displayed via her composition, and the findings of this study affirm a hybrid cultural identity as demonstrated via translanguaging and transcultural authorship.

Keywords: early adolescent, Mexican American girl, dialogue, translanguaging, Bakhtin, writing, cultural identity, transcultural

Composing her Growing Identities as a Mexican American

This paper addresses the cultural positioning of a Mexican American girl from the rural Southeast via her literate experiences. There was a dialogic construction and manifestation of both her heritage Mexican cultural position and the rural southeastern U.S. culture. The engagements she had with literacy expressed a cultural identity that fluctuated, and she at times expressed both simultaneously. The texts she read were mostly English-speaking regarding U.S. cultural contexts, but the language of the heritage stories she heard at home from her parents and other adults in her community was Mexican Spanish. In composing her own stories, her language use, as well as the motifs and tone of her writing, conveyed a cultural affiliation that was complex and multidimensional.

For one year, Maria, the fourteen-year-old Mexican American girl from an undocumented family in the rural Southeast, and another middle grades girl in her community had been involved in my pilot study investigating the writing behaviors of early adolescent Mexican American students. They shared with me their various compositions and we conducted monthly interviews regarding their pieces, as well as the intersections of their family, community, and daily life (Núñez, 2014). The interviews took place in the living room or on the dinner table in the dining room at Maria's home, where her mother could often be seen sweeping the floor, while carrying her toddler son. Maria's youngest sister read the Little Golden Book hard-cover copy of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* for the umpteenth time on the couch, her legs crossed and her head against a couch pillow, as her middle sister practiced jumping off of one of the armrests, and then did cartwheels across the living room floor. Meanwhile, the girls awaited their stepfather to return home from a tedious day-laboring job, before tending the night shift at the poultry processing plant in a few hours.

For Maria, reading and writing were significant parts of her life. Literacy had been her source of escape and a coping mechanism for as long as she could remember. When she was younger, and she got into trouble, her Spanish-speaking mother would send her to the room that she shared with her two sisters with nothing more than a book. Nestled comfortably at the foot of the bed facing the window, she told me she used to read for hours under the dim light of her room those young adult books she borrowed from the neighborhood clubhouse bookshelf. Two distinct languages and cultural contexts co-created her understanding of the worlds of the texts, as those same books also influenced her own cultural beliefs (Cai, 2002).

In her neighborhood, there was also evidence of gang insignia and illicit drug-sales, even as most residents worked diligently, lived peacefully, and cooperated to collaboratively raise their community's children. Literacy in fact had also been an escape for her, an escape from the reality in which she lived. She described these sentiments well in a poem composed on August 7, 2014, before she began middle school:

Escape From Reality
Travel Inside You
To Discover YourSelf
And What You Capable Of
Use Words
To Make Your Voice
Stronger And Louder
Write
To Describe
Different Stages In Your Life

Read

To Block All The Negativity Around You

Discover The Person Inside You

And

Escape From Reality

The sentiments described in this poem were why she gravitated more to the fantasy genre as a younger girl, as a way to “escape from reality” and “travel inside” herself. She also described literacy as method to “block all the negativity around you” to “discover the person inside you.”

For Maria, writing was an activity that shut out the clamor of the outside world, of chores and homework, of social drama and responsibilities, as she expressed “to just be inside [her] head.” In her lower-income, high-risk neighborhood, she sought to escape her surroundings, for her immediate reality outside the home was one in which she yearned to shed. But, for her, an “escape” was not always to venture out somewhere, but also inside herself, to recognition and formation of her identity. She presented writing as means to “use words to make [her] voice stronger and louder...to describe the different stages in [her] life,” as a way to assert her identity and to document her growth and development. This was what reading and composition also accomplished for her, to connect with, define, and document her identity and culture.

Words allowed that travel inside of her, to nurture that metacognitive awareness, to be just with her thoughts. Whether they were the words of a book or the words inside her head seeping on to the page, literacy formed one of those bridges between her internal and external worlds. There are many “tools available for writers to use – including other people, texts, technology, and language itself – [that] mediate the writing process, and these physical and symbolic resources are embedded in cultures and social relationships” (Kibler, 2013, p.47). In

fact, literacy also embodied her cultural identity (Kamler, 2001), even as she manifested her dual cultural and linguistic perspectives, indicative of her hybrid ethnic cultural identity (Bhabha, 1990). Ethnic identity can be defined as “one’s overall identity focused on the values, attitudes, and behaviors of one’s ethnic heritage culture, and becomes particularly salient during adolescence as youth increasingly reflect on the meaning of their ethnicity and the role it will play in their lives” (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015, p.88). My research questions were how did my participant use language and literacy to construct and express her cultural identity, her developmental age identity, and her sense of self. Specifically, how had my participant’s multiple linguistic and cultural memberships been expressed through her written composition?

Theoretical Framework

There can be multiple languages and cultures in a single piece of writing. It “is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated” (Bhabha, 1990, p.2). This hybrid text is a mixture of two realities, for in bilingual writing in particular, there are “two linguistic points of views, and in the final analysis two speaking subjects” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.76). They are social and cognitive acts influencing both the script and the writer’s own subjectivities (García & Wei, 2014). As Maria composed her writing, I saw a hybrid cultural identity expressed on the page.

Such composition from multiple cultural and linguistic frameworks at times manifest as translanguaging between vernaculars. When authors or readers “are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use” (García & Wei, 2014, p.20), they activate alternating linguistic and cultural frames for understanding as well. Translanguaging in writing, particularly with Spanish and English, activates contingent cultural voices as well. In fact,

“reading and writing are not only individual processes of meaning construction but also processes of social and symbolic transactions through which people learn to use written symbols within particular sociocultural worlds” (García & Gaddes, 2012, p.146).

These languages and meanings dialogue with each other in the cultural context of their creation (Bakhtin, 1986). In essence, a hybrid reality is presented in these writings that necessitate understanding dual notions of the world. The writer’s cultural identity, or identities, is continually in the process of becoming and is displayed in the diction, format, and style of writing (Bakhtin, 1981). For Latinx¹¹ students, “[t]ranslanguaging gives back the voice that had been taken away by ideologies of monoglot standards” (García & Wei, 2014, p.105). The reader, upon transaction with the text, is even privy to alternating subjective expressions. This relationship is heteroglossic and notions of reality multiple.

These individuals’ bilingualism and biculturalism also affected their identity (García & Wei, 2014). Through such practices as translanguaging, or “speakers’ construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of language” (p.22), bilingual people engage with a plurality of cultures as well. Although the dominant host culture and language also interacts and transacts with these home communities, heritage views conveyed through heritage languages largely characterizes the perspective of these locales. Here in the U.S., such individuals “can potentially live transnationally without having to sever ties to their countries of origin [and maintain] linguistic and cultural practices that may have been lost in past immigration” (Sánchez, 2007, p.260). There is a dialogic relationship with respects to culture and languages (Bakhtin, 1986).

¹¹ van Horne’s (2016) gender neutral referent to people of Latin American ancestry

Translanguaging “refers broadly to how bilingual students communicate and make meaning by drawing on and intermingling linguistic features from different languages” (Hornberger & Link, 2012, p.239). The practice involves the dialogic synthesis of distinct language contexts coming together to form a single hybridized language system with elements of each independent language system. This notion in literacy education views the languages of bilinguals “not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 2). This one system is hybridized, harking back to two linguistic consciousness and conventions.

In her bilingual, bicultural compositions, her use of the English “language is structured and perceived in the light of another language, and in some instances not only the accents but also the syntactical forms of the vulgar language [Spanish] are clearly sensed” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.75). In writing, the use of Mexican Spanish is unsanctioned in most U.S. Language Arts classrooms, and thus forms the visceral, vulgar element. The host southeastern U.S. culture “only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7). The same is true of Mexican American students’ home Mexican culture, which reveals its depths in encounters with the U.S. culture. In fact, in this encounter of cultures, “they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures” (p.7). This cultural encounter between the host U.S. culture and a minority individual’s home culture gives adds depth and meaning to each culture.

Method

For this study, I conducted a narrative inquiry as a single qualitative case study lasting three years (Reissman, 2005; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2001). I went to her community setting every

two months to gather data. In examining my participant's stories as elicited from observations, interviews, and her writing, I looked for cultural affiliation and memberships throughout all these data. I sought to uncover "a multivocality and multiplicity" in her stories (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2001, p.109), especially in her multilingual and multicultural texts, where her perspectives were plural. In such ways, her cultural identities and memberships were also made salient, their interactions and transactions also evident.

Participant Selection

I came to know Maria when I was serving as a counselor in her neighborhood as part of my assistantship for my doctoral program. The neighborhood clubhouse was an afterschool learning and activity center for children (Jones et al., 2016). Maria was an active participant at the center, even leading groups, such as Young Storytellers, where she led book discussions with other members. I selected her among her peers because she regularly composed writing and was willing to be interviewed.

As I got to know more about her, I discovered that her mother had come alone to the U.S. from Mexico pregnant with her. Maria was bilingual in both Spanish and English, and sometimes even composed bilingual writing. I became interested in her writing and engagements with literacy, and how her cultural orientation was dialogic between her heritage Mexican self and her dominant culture U.S. self as expressed in her writing.

Research Design

To investigate Maria's literate and cultural behaviors, I conducted a single qualitative case study lasting three years from March of 2014 to March of 2017 in her community in the rural U.S. South (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I collected qualitative data and coded them based on my study parameters (Merriam, 1988). Data consisted of writing samples, both digital and hard-

copy, observations from field notes, and hour-long semi-structured interviews. I identified common themes that spanned the three types of data.

This type of research aims “not to establish relationships between variables (as in experimental studies) but, rather, to see what some phenomenon means as it is socially enacted in a particular case” (Dyson & Genish, 2005, p.10, parenthetical in original). There was not a causal analysis of data, but rather a descriptive endeavor meant at identifying connections across different layers of variables and meanings. I visited her once every other month during the school year in her community enclave, where I conducted twelve hour-long recorded semistructured interviews. I also observed her on excursions when I would take her and her sisters to the mall or to a fast food restaurant. I coded my observations according to themes I drew from the interview transcripts, and vice versa. Ongoing during my visits were also the collection of her writing, which she shared both digitally and in hard-copy. I coded these written specimens with added markers, such as cultural allusions, tone, metaphors, and Spanish influences. Four digital writing samples were emailed to my Gmail mailbox. For her school writing samples, she shared her class Google Drive. I chose to study in depth 39 pieces of school assignments spanning fifth to eighth grades. The pieces were chosen because they expressed one of the components of her cultural identity, later addressed in the analysis.

For school, I also digitally acquired 34 pages of her typed pre-writing notes and reactions to texts on dated pieces spanning sixth through eighth grades. Via her drive, I obtained six typed assignments of free-verse poetry done regarding different topics, and also collected her 41 pieces written for the a summer writing camp. Finally, I also assigned four short one-paragraph writing

responses to prompts and received digital responses on two. She wrote in English only for both, and chose an essay for the first prompt and poetry for the second¹².

Data Analysis

I studied the written data for evidence of cultural and linguistic hybridity (Bhabha, 1990, Bakhtin, 1986), coding heritage and dominant U.S. cultural themes and vernaculars. I looked for connections and engagements between her cultural attitudes and her literate expressions. I analyzed the tone and style of writing, as well as the diction and imageries for cultural affiliation. I coded language, style, and content for both Mexican and U.S. elements. I engaged in text analysis of her writing (Leki, 1991), analyzing certain writing conventions, such as “preferred length of sentences, choice of vocabulary, acceptability of using first person, extent of using passive voice [and] the amount of metaphorical language” (p.125).

The codes developed for her writing included: Culture/Race, Gender, Family, Friends, School, Class, Developmental Age, Reading, Writing, Pop Culture, Geography, Border Crossing, Stress, Cultural Allusions, Tone, Metaphors, and Spanish Language Influences. I color coded all of her writing according to these themes. Cultural hybridity was operationalized as two or more Cultures/Race codes within a single piece of writing. The other codes present in the writing were analyzed in relations to the cultural codes that were also present (either Mexican, majority U.S., or another minority)¹³. An explicit manifestation of her hybridity was her bilingual pieces, both in prose and in poetry. Certain diction that were synonymous in English and Spanish often had nuanced differences, so that the meaning of a Spanish correlate also connoted slight differences due to additional connotations that authored a different tone.

¹² Refer to Appendix 1

¹³ Refer to Appendix 2

Findings

Maria's writing could often be a hybridized composition of her cultural and linguistic identities. The languages and cultures her writing is based on, English and Spanish, from the U.S. and Mexico respectively, are hybridized versions of European vernaculars and cultures. Bakhtin (1981) envisions hybridity as the "mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor" (p. 358). In fact, in the engagement of words, Maria's "two languages are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis, two speaking subjects" (p.76).

Reading and Writing to Transact Cultures and Eras

Words, language, and themes in part captured Maria's culture, through what she read (Cai, 2002) or what she composed (Cuero, 2009; García & Gaddes, 2012). For instance, Maria wrote a poem about what words meant to her, in this piece entitled "Wherever I Go":

Monstrous human-beings

Shower me with words

Like a thunder storm

Giving free lightning

To everyone who passes

Words, Words, Words

That's all I hear

Everyday of my life

And that's

Where ever I go (October 19, 2014)

In this poem, there are the fantastical imageries of “monstrous human-beings” unleashing a thunderstorm of words. There are elements of Greek mythology, and of Zeus wielding his blades of lightening above the thick, thunderous sky. In this poem, she also unintentionally referenced *Hamlet*, with the phrase, “Words, words, words.”

She was delighted that she and the Bard, William Shakespeare, penned the same phrase, obvious from her wide smile and beaming eyes when I informed her of the connection. The next time we met, she showed me another poem that grew from her original:

Words,Words,Words

They connect me

Like jungle gym

They move me

Like dolphin swimming

On and on

Words are my life

Cause

They are everything

I am

From head to toe

They connect me

They move me

And they are my life

Words,Words,Words (October 26, 2014)

In this piece, she described words as the connection between and within her life, the adhesive that conjoined her body parts and “connected” her. The phrase “Words, words, words,” connected and without spaces, bookended this piece, and from the beginning and end, as all things in her life began and ended with words. In her case, “language [was] the main tool that promote[d] thinking, develop[ed] reasoning, and support[ed] cultural activities such as reading and writing” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.3). Furthermore, she was immediately captivated by the fact that she connected with Shakespeare, a White, male, Elizabethan playwright and poet, indicating affinity for White culture.

Maturing Identities through Writing

A child’s fantasy engagements.

I collected Maria’s writing composed from her 5th through to the 8th grades, spanning 2014 to 2017. I found when she was in her elementary school year, Maria tended to write a lot about White Disney characters. Per her poetry, she used writing as an escape from her reality, as a liberatory act. She wrote for a school assignment in the start of 6th grade, “I would rather write a narrative because when I write a narrative I feel as I am more free. Then my imagination starts jumping around and I get to dance” (September 17, 2014). This sense of freedom came from the possibility to use language to capture her imagination.

For example, in her writing, her characters often ventured to the mythical underwater city of Atlantis, as when interviewed on June 16, 2014, she articulated, “I also wrote stories about me being in Atlantis, like the underwater city. Yeah, I sometimes dream of it, and I wrote it.” So, the escape that was referenced to in her August 14th poem was central to her composition. The city of Atlantis, the setting for many of her earlier pieces about mermaids and princesses, served as

her refuge for her characters. This city was grounded in Western culture, first referenced in Plato's writings and later in Bacon's and Moore's utopian Renaissance works (Faucet, 2014).

I asked her how her stories ended, and she replied, "Well, they ended by finding out who they really were" (Interview, June 16, 2014). Through composing, she asserted an identity for her characters. She went on to say regarding her fictional narrative writing: "They're really about mostly this magical world, whenever like somewhere it really exists. Mostly, some of my stories are about magical worlds, about being in Disney, like I got some of my characters like Tinkerbell into this other story." In her narratives she wrote and in most of the texts she read when she was younger, most of the characters were White, such as Tinkerbell and Ariel.

When I asked Maria in the fifth grade about whether she wrote about her Mexican culture, she responded, "I don't really write about my culture. Well, I'm Mexican, but I really write a lot of Disney stuff, and go into another world, like all underwater, or somewhere magical. But, it's always about here, about being here" (Interview, June 16, 2014). "Here" referred to the U.S. or a Western cultural context, like those depicted in traditional Disney fairytales and the majority contexts of schools and malls. Her cultural affiliation was complex, however. Even while she claimed to be Mexican, she only knew the southeastern U.S. and also asserted her affinity for Disney, an aspect of U.S. culture often criticized for its ideological and racial bias towards White culture (Hurley, 2005). For example, the character Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* was in several of her pieces, such as this composed on loose paper on August 18, 2014:

"A Sudden Change"

Splash! Wow! did I just see a mermaid tail, ~~splash~~ in the water. Well, ~~does~~
~~are~~ there is only one way to find out. So I dived in the ocean and swimed to where
the mermaid was and I was right! It is a mermaid. Not only a mermaid but it is

Airel the mermaid princess. Cool. So I followed her, and I caught up to her. Airel said “Nice to meet you.” I replied “Nice to meet you too.” Airel said “Hey, I like your tail”. What?! Yeah, oh, I have to leave bye! Airel said. Oh, well Airel left.

Now I had time to figure out, how I grew a tail.

In this piece, she escaped to a magical underwater world. Not only did she see the redheaded mermaid princess, but she also became a mermaid herself at the end of the piece. I coded this piece as youth White U.S. culture.

In her writing, she described the world of mermaids of White heritage constructed by Disney. In this monolingual English piece, I saw her also composing her cultural identity (Blommaert, 2010; García & Gaddes, 2012; Kamler, 2001). In these fantasy literate activities, she incorporated many White characters in White narratives written completely in English. She also often wrote poetry to construct her fantasy world, such as this piece:

Am I dreaming?

I guess I am.

I am lost also,

I can feel those flowers speaking to me,

Saying don't feel be lost, little princess.

We know your mamma Snow White,

they tell me.

Now I see my mamma and I ran to her. (August 25, 2014)

In this poem, coded youth White U.S. culture again, she imagined herself as Snow White, another Disney princess. In her compositions when she was younger, she often assumed a White ethnic identity.

Bridging fantasy and reality.

However, as Maria got older, I noticed that her writing focus started to shift. She began to develop greater personal agency and heritage voice in her life, as well as a more explicit manifestation of her family's cultural identity and story. For example, in an assignment for school composed in the sixth grade, she wrote about Christmas at her home:

Christmas is finally here! Have you ever celebrated Christmas? Well if you haven't, read on and find out why Christmas is so important.

One part of Christmas is having family traditions. The first detail about having family traditions is having everyone in your family united or together. You might also have a special dinner for your family. The last detail about tradition are presents for members of your family.

Second part of Christmas is having food. One thing you might eat are tamales. Have you ever tasted tamales before? Well I have. They're as soft as a soft and puffy as a marshmellow. You might also have a special fruit punch for your family, it is as sweet as a bowl full of ice cream. Mmm...One last thing you might each are creamy, soft mash potatoes.

Finally the last part of Christmas is having a little family time. One activity you might do is dance with your family members. One thing about Christmas is being joyful with one another. That's what Christmas is all about! One last activity you might do is open presents at midnight.

Christmas is a fun holiday! I hope you have fun! Christmas is as fun as kids riding a rollercoaster! (December, 2014)

In this Christian holiday, I could see her dual cultural identities expressed simultaneously in this bicultural piece, as I coded this piece as containing both U.S. and Mexican influence. There were traditional U.S. Christian customs, like eating mashed potatoes and drinking fruit punch, and spending time with family members, and even dancing with them. Yet, there were also elements of heritage traditions, like eating tamales and opening presents at midnight before Christmas day, instead of waiting until the next morning.

I also noticed that the language and style of writing she used in this piece was indicative of her schooling in the U.S., in particular the five paragraph essay format, of writing main ideas and supporting evidence in paragraphs. Additionally, her sixth grade class had just had a unit on the use of similes to describe objects and ideas. Maria used this device to describe tamales, which she wrote as “soft and puffy as a marshmallow,” fruit punch, “as sweet as a bowl full of ice cream,” and the celebration of Christmas, which was “as fun as kids riding a rollercoaster.” The three similes were unique and personal, at once familiar and imagined. She injected dimensions of her being to personalize her composition.

In an interview on October 14, 2014, she spoke about her use of similes: “When you use similes in your own writing, it actually describes what your story is about. It actually gives it more meaning. It gives more meaning to the story because you’re actually describing something to something else.” This linguistic device not only embellished her writing, but could even inspire more texts. Later in the interview, she added, using similes “helps me a lot with my writing because when you don’t know what else to write, and then you come up with a simile, and you describe what’s happening in your story to what simile you’re going to write.” The use of such devices could even lead to the generation of newer ideas for her, and she could structure her story with the use of specific analogies to connect with the cultures they implied. For

instance, “tamales” implied a more Mexican culture whereas “a bowl full of ice cream” alluded to a more dominant U.S. culture, even as she described a holiday celebrated in both cultures.

By utilizing similes, she was also engaging her two cultures by describing her world using elements from both the Mexican and U.S. cultures. Maria’s cultural world was a hybrid of at least two narratives (majority culture and heritage), of at least two languages (English and Spanish) and two cultures, the dominant U.S. Southern culture and the heritage Michoacán culture. She sometimes even spoke with a Southern twain, prolonging and sliding down the intonation of “Well...” before beginning her description of an anecdote or her opinion about some issue. She spoke only in English to me and to the other teachers, and conversed mostly in English with her sisters and with her friends. But, she also spoke mostly Spanish with her parents, with the other adults in the community and with her two youngest brothers.

When I asked her about how she felt about writing, she answered, “Writing is really, *really*, really easy for me” (Interview, January 28, 2015). I have often found her writing on her Chromebook fictional stories or her most recent love – spoken-word poetry. She commented how writing in free-verse gave her freedom with word choice and language, where she “could just write [her] thoughts out.” Through free-verse poetry, she expressed more freely her ethnic cultural identity.

As Maria had gotten older, I have seen shifts in the voice and tone of her writing. The perspective of her writing had also shifted, as indicated by a shift of codes, from that of White-centric Disney characters to an embracing of her heritage culture and race. She not only wanted to construct fictional narratives, but to author her own as well, her own personal place in her world. I began to hear her own voice, not in just narrating a constructed imagined world, but in

creation of her own lived reality. In her more recent writing, Maria then displayed these coexisting dual linguistic and cultural references.

In this poem she wrote in sixth grade for the Martin Luther King Writing Contest, her social justice lens and her position within these two cultures and languages were depicted in two different colors:

<u>When will</u>	<u>Cuando Vivere</u>
<u>I live A Better</u>	<u>Una Vida</u>
<u>Life?</u>	<u>Mejor?</u>
I have a dream	Mi sueno es
That one day	Que un dia
I will get to cross	Pueda crusa
The Border	La Frontera
Here I am	Aqui Estoy
Every day	Pero cada dia
It gets worse	Esta Peor
The worst thing	La cosa mas peor
Is that	Es que
In the train	En el tren
“The Beast”	“La Bestia’
There is nothing	No ai nada
To eat or Be warm	Para comer o Para esta caliente
When will the President	Cuando sera que el Presidente

Barack Obama let us	Barack Obama los dejara	
Mexicans cross	Nosotros Mexicanos Crussar	
The border	La Frontera	
And let us live	Y dejar que vivamos	
A better life	Una Vida Mejor	
That is my dream.	Ese es mi sueno.	(February 17, 2015)

This piece was coded as both Mexican and U.S. culture. The Spanish text was coded as Mexican influence, as well as the portions of the English from a Mexican point of view, such as using the first person plural in referring to Mexicans. This time both cultural identities are from a more mature perspective in describing the plight of Mexicans desiring to cross the border. United States elements, such as President Obama and the English language were also present.

By composing texts as a system of both English and Spanish, she “combine[d] and juxtapose[d] scripts as well as explore[d] connections and differences between their available writing systems in their text making” (García & Wei, 2014, p.67). Maria utilized the nuances in language to compose different tones, particularly in lines 3-4, where she wrote “I will get to cross/The Border” in English, and “pueda crusa/La Frontera” in Spanish. Although “frontera” may be translated to “border,” there was also the added meaning of “frontier.” If viewed from a Mexican migrant’s perspective, the border separating Mexico and the U.S. could indeed be conceived of as a frontier. So, with this respect, her language use also positioned her culturally, and changed the context for interpreting the piece’s meaning and tone, to manifest a heteroglossic piece from two voices (Bakhtin, 1981; Jaworski, 2012). The two languages and meanings derived from them dialogically affect each other.

But her U.S. cultural and English linguistic identities were also evident. First, the structure of this piece was modeled on Dr. King's *I Have a Dream* speech, with the opening phrase, "I have a dream that one day." In fact, her social studies class in her public middle school was studying the U.S. Civil Rights Movement at the time, and this particular speech in the historical context of the era. A similarity was the importance of geographical place in both texts. Whereas Dr. King referenced the red hills of Georgia, and the sweltering heat of Mississippi and Alabama, Maria described the U.S.-Mexican border, emphasizing the in-between-ness that she felt within these two cultures. Dr. King was also presenting dichotomous cultures in his piece: that of Black and White cultures and of Northern and Southern cultures, emphasizing the double-voicedness of African Americans. While translanguaging, Maria engaged in "transculturation" (Smith, 2003, p. 476) among different cultures within the U.S. She exemplified a double-voicedness in her code-switching compositions, common among Latina youths (Kryatzis, 2010).

The diction Maria used to describe this journey aboard "The Beast," of an expedition rife with "coyotes," connoted a dehumanizing tone (Groody, 2014). The fact was that people migrating through the southern borders were subject to primal savagery and made to endure unspeakable tortures on their journeys, another connection with the experience of slavery. Her own focus on the dehumanizing aspect of her family's and others' in her community crossover corresponded then to what she learned in her school, from the history of slavery in the U.S. to Nazism in Germany during World War II. She immediately attached to the theme of humanity in these topics, that she repeatedly asserted her humanity and the humanity of many of her characters in her writing, from mermaids to oppressed peoples in her writing.

This utilization and ownership of distinct languages did correspond to disparate cultural historical orientations and global psyches (Blommert & Rampton, 2011). Each language

conjured a unique collective past, with shared memories and experiences. By bifurcating this piece by language and by meaning, she was also transposing her dual linguistic consciousness, where her two languages presented and represented distinct aspects of her cultural identity (Montrol, 2010; Ortega, 2009). Yet while these two cultural positionings were at odds in her daily life, in this piece, they conjoined to incite social activism. Also, the themes of space and geographies, of the inaccessibility of places, also undergirded her writing (Iqbal & Starr, 2015). These two spaces were given different identities, purporting different power standings in each locale. Even though in the piece, she was situated in Mexico dreaming of coming over to the U.S., she did not describe the actual place of Mexico.

Additionally, she often expressed her anxieties and social discomfort in writing, particularly free-verse poetry. For example, a segment of another bilingual piece composed on June 22, 2015 reads:

I always stand	Siempre me levanto
Up for myself	Por yo misma
Never letting	Nunca dejando
Anyone push me	Que alguien me empuje
From my Hopes	De Mis Emperanzas
Or dreams	O mi sueños
And I am one	Y yo soy alguien
That even though	Que a pesar de que
I might be poor	Soy pobre
Economically	En la economia
But	Pero

Rich in my heart	Rica en mi corazon
And	Y
I will <u>always</u> have	Yo <u>Siempre</u> tendre
My head raised	Mi cabeza elevar
Up	Ariba
Not Down	No abajo
'Cause I am one	Porque Yo soy alguien
That has pride	Que tiene orgullo
In my heritage	En mi Herencia
Not shame	No verguenza
And	Y
I am a	Soy una
Human- being	Ser-Humano

Here, the theme of being human, or “ser-humano,” was again explicitly articulated. Along with being Mexican and American, a child and an adult, she was also materially poor, but spiritually or emotional rich. This was coded as Mexican influence, given the Spanish text and also the perspective of the writer, as that of a Mexican American girl assertive of her heritage ethnicity. In Maria’s composition, the story of *La Llorona*, or *The Weeping Woman*, was sometimes used as impetus for her writing of frightening narratives. The tale originated in Aztec legends, and was about a native woman falling in love with a Spanish man, and who drowned her children in a lake to be with him (Herrera-Sobek, 2012). The man then refused her love, so in her devastation she drowned herself in that same lake. The grief-stricken mother was stopped at the

gates of Heaven, and was forced to wander the banks of the lake searching for her children's souls, crying out for them in vain.

I asked if the story *La Llorona* ever inspired her own writing. She replied, "Yeah, a lot. You can use this story to scare your friends" (Interview June 27, 2014). She wrote for a school assignment during Halloween about the mystery of the haunted house in her neighborhood:

What I am Afraid of...

One thing I am afraid of is the "Hauted House". One reason I scared about it is it's legend. They say that someone used to live there and disappeared. Another reason is it's appearance. How it looks like. It is freaky. Well, the windows are broken and you can barley see the house from all the weeds. Oh. If you try to take a picture of it you hear some-one tapping on the window and you hear like the house come alive! Freaky! Well that's a haunted house! The hauted house is scariest place in the community. It is the legend that makes it scarey. The legend was that people used to live there, then poof! They disappeared. There is a black cat that gards the house. (October, 2014)

The writing was coded U.S. cultural influence, in that it described a local building for the U.S. holiday of Halloween, with elements of Mexican culture too. Mexican influence was from *La Llorona*, in the legendary aspect of the abandoned abode being passed orally down and among residents of a gruesome murder of a family who once lived there. The fact that a family disappeared corresponded to *La Llorona*'s children's spirits disappearing as well. Still another influence from the Mexican folklore was the auditory aspects of Maria's story. She described how one could "hear" someone tapping on the windows and "hear" the house come alive. These

aural aspects related to the story of *La Llorona*, and the eerie sound of her weeping for her children. She had hybridized the space of the U.S. neighborhood with Mexican stories.

She spoke to me later about how she wrote about her world:

You have this thing that it actually tells you what it's about. Say, there's a little dog. You can write about where the dog was. But, sometimes you can actually make stuff up like, *It was the only dog to see on the street*, and things like that. But, like taking it in and putting a whole world, and like probably you can read this book about dogs, and you see a dog here, and you can actually take stuff from that book into your own writing. And it actually reads more like your writing, because you actually wrote about the dog, and the nature around it, where it's located, like where it is. (Interview, January 23, 2015)

So, in her composition of her world, there was some poetic license in adding specific details for the sake of the narrative tone or effect. She described the link between reading and writing, and also saw story everywhere around her waiting for her to uncover.

Standing up for her people and heritage.

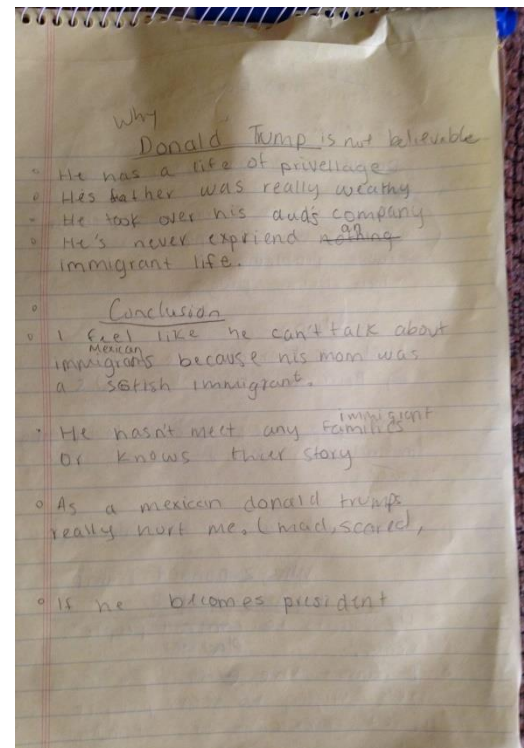
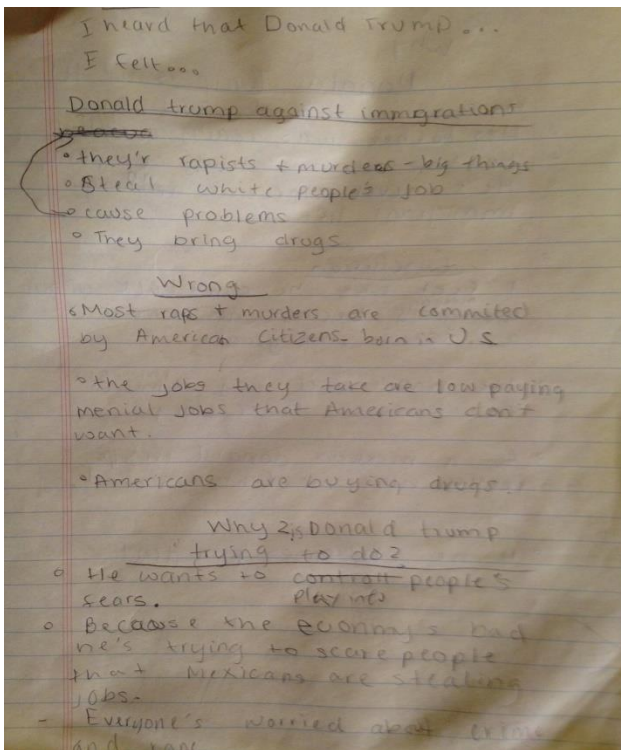
Yet, Maria was also growing more aware of the struggle of Mexican Americans, and defiantly asserted her ethnic identity. There was a fundamental shift in her existence as well, where she was also entering a new reality, one which caused her to reconceive of her identity as she entered adolescence (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015). Although now, her contextual issues of adolescence also came with the rise of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, and his xenophobic, anti-immigrant stance (Giroux, 2016). Her earlier piece, *When Will I Live a Better Life* actually anticipated this topic.

Indeed, Maria and her family had always been skeptical of Trump's rise. When expressing her feelings regarding the business mogul turned politician, she wrote:

Donald Trump says one stereotype of Mexicans is that they're kidnappers, rapers, criminals. Well, there is some Mexicans like that, but not all Mexicans are like that. Some Mexicans work, like day and night like my dad to be able to help their families, to be able to maintain them. (September 14, 2016)

I coded this as Mexican heritage culture, for even though she described a U.S. politician, she wrote from a Mexican perspective. Maria took on a more thoughtful argument, by admitting that some Mexicans were indeed criminals, but not everyone. Also, she connected personally with his rhetoric by describing her stepfather, whom she called "dad," as defying those characterizations, bridging her personal world and the political one.

In fact, her passion even made her compose an essay on July 29, 2015, just as Trump's campaign was beginning. In this piece, her concerns about families and immigration, and living the American Dream, were shown. She explicitly detailed much of Trump's statements against "illegal" immigrants, that they stole jobs, committed rapes and murders, while bringing drugs into the US. She kept notes of our conversations in a pre-writing draft on a legal pad she kept under her bed.



We discussed these issues, and she decided on the essay format as the best means to argue against his presidency. A portion reads:

Recently, there has been a debate about Immigration from Mexico to the United States, and whether there needs to be more border security. At the center of this issue is Donald Trump, the real estate billionaire now running for president. Donald Trump believes that Mexican immigrants are rapists, murders, and cause big conflict. He also believes that they steal white people's jobs and bring drugs to the U.S.

Although, he claims these beliefs are fact statics will prove him wrong. Most rapes and murders are committed by American citizens born in the U.S. Also the jobs immigrants take are low paying menial jobs that Americans don't want and Mexican immigrants take to support their family.

Lastly, if Americans wouldn't buy drugs then why will immigrants bring them to the U.S? In addition, there are different groups dedicated to bringing drugs in the United States are separate from families that just want a better life...

While Donald Trump feels he is qualified to become president of his business experience, his comments about immigrants raise concerns. He can't talk about Mexican immigrants because his mother was actually an immigrant herself. He's never met any Mexican families or know the reasons they came to the United States. As a Mexican I can say that his comments hurt families and makes them feel like outsiders. If he becomes president it might make it difficult for Mexican families to live the American Dream. (July 29, 2015)

I coded this essay as Mexican cultural perspective but she was positioned inside the U.S. She composed phrases like, “came” to the U.S., instead of “went,” and described life inside the U.S. Even so positioned, she was still writing from a Mexican American viewpoint, as she defended Mexicans from Trump’s castigation, arguing, “He’s never met any Mexican families or know the reasons they came to the United States.”

After Trump’s election victory, I came to see how she, her family, and her community were doing. When I asked her how she felt, she told me:

I’m very upset that he won. I was really hoping Hillary would win, but things happen. We’re gonna wait and see what happens. I think they’re joking about it, but they said we might move to Canada. They were just joking about it. My dad

had said to not panic, because we don't know what's gonna happen. (Interview, November 16, 2016).

Maria's response was mature and pensive. But, I also saw tense anticipation and anxiety amongst residents in her community. These families began thinking about very real and life-altering options for their futures.

Becoming Double-Voiced and Biliterate

Two years prior, in the summer of 2014, Maria was oblivious to the realities of policy and the turmoil of politics. When I asked her what she liked to write, she answered with a grin, "They're really about mostly this magical world, whenever like somewhere it really exists. Mostly, some of my stories are about magical worlds, about being in Disney, like I got some of my characters like Tinkerbell into this other story" (Interview, June 16, 2014). Her world was even so connected to Disney stories that she referred to her two younger sisters as "evil sisters."

When she was younger, her writing was most always set in the dominant culture, full of Disney and other popular culture allusions. But, as she matured, her life began dialoguing with her dominant culture realities (Bakhtin, 1986). She was in-between two cultures, the dominant culture of Southeast U.S. and her heritage Mexican culture (García & Gaddes, 2012). For example, in this piece, Maria composed a poem about her neighborhood over two years later:

I am from the bright sun in the early mornings
To the loud explosions from fireworks.
From the bells of the *paleteros* (ice cream cart)
ringing in the afternoons, urging kids to buy the *paletas* (popsicles)
to the sizzling meat on the grill.
I'm from the red clay river under the bridge where nothing goes

to the spice of candy made from *tamarindos* (tamarind).

From having social anxiety

to the savory taste of *chicharones* (deep-fried meat),

I'm from the sizzling paper igniting fire

to the sweet drink of *ochettas* (sweet drink).

I am from nature where I'm free and wild,

to society where I'm small and quiet. (September 8, 2016)

This piece was coded as U.S. geographical culture with Mexican culture. She chose turquoise as the color for her text, more symbolic of her Mexican heritage, whereas she used both navy blue and turquoise for her piece, "When Will I Live a Better Life."

The format for this poem was based on George Ella Lyon's *Where I'm From* poem, with the repetitions of the phrase "I am from," a connection to the White U.S. culture. Similar to Lyon's piece, Maria described her childhood and the cultural artifacts that composed her world. There was also a sense of movement and progression, even though the destination was bleak, as in "to society where I'm small and quiet." Where Lyon described her childhood and her roots, Maria described her current environment in both English and Spanish. Unlike the earlier bilingual pieces, where her two languages were bifurcated, she wove both English and Spanish in this one, translanguaging "to assume more linguistic flexibility" (Hornberger & Link, 2012, p.262), and to break the semantic boundaries between the two languages and cultures (García & Wei, 2014). The Spanish words were used for terms that have deep cultural meanings and are distinctly Mexican.

For example, the word *paleteros* means "ice cream cart" in English. However, *paleteros* also have cultural significance, originating in Michoacán (Tester, Yen, & Laraia, 2010). The

paletas are distinctly Mexican in taste, with flavors such as *limón con chile*, or lime with chilies, and *pepino y uvas*, or cucumber and grape. In the rural southern landscape, the paleteros coursed across the hills towards the children returning home after school. Neighborhood fireworks and the bells from the paletero carts added an aural dimension to the piece. Language, particularly written language, was thus an important and vivid manifestation of her cultural identity (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011). As she moved between two vernaculars fluidly in her text, she also engaged with the historicity and cultural contexts of the languages (Back, 2013).

Maria's cultural self was hybridized (Bhabha, 1990), an in-between cultural positioning between the dominant southeastern U.S. culture and her heritage Michoacán Mexican culture (Campbell, 2015). In many ways, I saw her cultural positioning as a dialogue between these two cultures among others (Urrieta, 2007), the former the larger context in which she had lived all her life, and the latter constructed from the tales of parents, the activities of her neighbors, and the aura of her home, with its distinct languages, music, and foods. Through her literate activities, Maria had assumed varying degrees of cultural affinity and identification through translanguaging and transculturation.

Discussion

Maria's literate activities, the way she read and wrote, manifested her complex cultural identity (Bhabha, 1990). That manifestation, in both English and Spanish, with both Disney and majority culture elements as well as heritage Spanish Mexican factors, can be conceived of as a dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986). The middle school years are a tumultuous time for social interaction and identity negotiation, especially in conjunction with national policies and their current curricula (Ortmeier-Hooper & Enright, 2011). This ambivalence can often be expressed in the writing of these adolescents as they grapple with such interdependent contextual issues. When

she was younger, she embraced both cultures: the U.S. culture and her heritage Mexican culture. But, as she had gotten older, she learned to advocate for her heritage identity, for her community and for her family.

From interviewing, observing, and interacting with her in various spaces, I had seen Maria grow and mature, both in terms of literacy and in terms of her cultural identity. Whereas at the end of elementary school, she was still drawn to U.S.-specific cultural artifacts, such as Disney characters and princess fairytales, throughout the years, she came to explicitly identify more with her Mexican heritage. In fact, I can remember as a scheme to coax her to write more often in elementary school, I bought her a spiral notebook with Ariel the Disney mermaid on the cover, her favorite character. She was ecstatic, and kept it beneath her mattress, and planned on saving the notebook for her most important writings. Even though Mexico was never far from her in her childhood, from the Spanish she spoke at home to the numerous plaques of the Virgin of Guadalupe that adorned her abode, her cultural identity as expressed in her writing and reading choices was more in line with White American attitudes.

As she matured into and through middle school, and she began formally studying Spanish as a second language, her cultural position as expressed in her writing and interviews began changing. According to Umaña-Taylor and colleagues (2015), adolescence is a developmental stage that “is uniquely characterized as a period in which the consequences of one’s ethnic identity are particularly pronounced” (p.88). It was the greater awareness of her status in this country in conjunction with Donald Trump’s campaign and his anti-Mexican immigration rhetoric that her writing became noticeably geared towards greater social agency. No longer was she just composing texts for her sisters to enjoy, for herself to escape or indulge in her fantasy and dreams; she now wanted to foment social change and activism (Freire, 1970).

Many years ago, she was in her mother's belly coming from Mexico into the U.S., personifying the transnational identity and experience (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Vertovec, 2001). In my observations, I could also see her own border crossings presently that paralleled her mother's. Every time she conjoined her Spanish with her English in her compositions, I saw her also defiantly meshing her Mexican with U.S. selves as well. In fact, her writing was quite literally "double voiced" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.326). The stratification of her identity, as the first-born and first U.S.-born daughter of undocumented Mexican parents, as an English-speaking parentified-child (Orellana, 2009) and older sister to four siblings, as a student and liaison with the outside English-speaking world, and as an early adolescent girl with expectations beyond her years, partitioned her being into distinct realities (Hermans, 2001; Núñez, 2014).

The assumption of other cultural identities then can be conceived as assuming "alterities [which] as a central feature of well-developed dialogue, is a necessity in a world in which individuals and cultures are confronted with differences that they may not understand initially but that may become comprehensible and meaningful as the result of a dialogical process" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.31). In a context where she was exposed to her heritage language of Mexican Spanish and heritage cultural artifacts (e.g., food, television shows, music, Mexican food) daily, as well as to the plethora of dominant cultural manifestations (e.g., U.S. food, movies, television shows, books, iPad), her lived reality encompassed a hybrid of both. Maria was liable to possess "cultural hybridity, multi-positional identities" (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998, p.5). The multicultural allusions and bilingualism inherent in her composition mirrored this cultural perspective (Canagarajah, 2011). Maria's cultural orientations were not just hybrid, but also built atop of each other (McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg, & Soliani, 2007), exhibiting

a “multilayered identity” (p.299) of a multicultural southeastern U.S. adolescent identity on heritage core Mexican values.

In Bakhtin’s (1986) views, “[s]uch a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing [as each] retains its own unity and *open* totality, but they are mutually enriched” (p.7). Maria’s hybrid culture, then, was not one in which her Mexican and U.S. cultural elements have blended uniformly so that traces of either are unrecognizable. Each culture enriched and affected the other. In her literacy practices, particularly her writing, I saw elements of both cultural (Cuero, 2009) and linguistic consciousness (Blommaert, 2010).

Translanguaging through Cultural Spaces

Maria’s current world consisted of the primarily English-speaking context of her eighth grade classroom and her larger societal backdrop, and the predominantly Spanish-speaking realm of her home, as well as the bilingual space of the neighborhood (Schechter, Sharken-Taboada, & Bayley, 1996). In these intersecting domains, different degrees of ethnic cultural affiliations also applied, as the dominant majority culture of the southeastern United States prevailed at school and the Michoacán Mexican culture at home, and with the multicultural context of the neighborhood playground, all existed in conjunction in her life. In each of these settings, Maria’s cultural perspective was also hybrid and her expression of these places bilingual as well, “creating an interdependence among all components of the system” (García & Wei, 2014, p.25).

In this sense, physical space also had particular significance for her life (Iqbal & Starr, 2015; Soja, 1989), as geographies took on a critical aspect tied to notions of economy and power, as well as language. Her words made her unique cultural voice “stronger and louder,” and empowered her in an outside world that did not give her much agency. Additionally, her bilingual identity allowed her “to draw on translanguaging, or flexible language practices that

contradict monolingual...ideologies at the national level and help [her] negotiate multilingual and multicultural identities across home and community settings” (Hornberger & Link, 2012, p.264).

Translanguaging refers to actually “leveraging” a linguistic semiotic repertoire to engage in dialogic meaning making (García & Wei, 2014, p.69), so that the entire system of languages creates a new meaning and tone. Engaging with reality in both English and Spanish was a means for her to display different attitudes about her world. In fact, Maria professed that her bilingual abilities was what distinguished her and some of her school friends, as she once told me, “Sometimes, it’s harder to talk to them [outside culture peers], because sometimes you probably bring up your other language. I know that the culture we’re in, how you speak is how you express yourself about who you are” (Interview, June 16, 2014). For her, language usage was ardently related to one’s cultural and social identity (Blommaert, 2010), and to expression of that identity. So, in a sense, as she translanguaged in her speech and writing, she also shifted in cultural perspective and voice, identifying with different social and cultural frameworks.

Despite being bilingual, she had read mostly young adult literature in English, including *The Hunger Games* series, as well as *The Hobbit*, by J.R.R. Tolkien. Maria’s favorite genre to read was fantasy. Even though she felt a connection with Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* in terms of socioeconomic class, gender, and developmental age, these stories were mostly about White characters living in an English-speaking context. However, her neighborhood, on the rural outskirts of town, was made up predominantly of other undocumented Mexican families with multiple children whose heritage language is Spanish. She manifested these multiple identities in conjunction, negotiating between and within each cultural positioning (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Sánchez, 1993). Her U.S. cultural position

was represented by her engagements with Disney and other popular culture artifacts, as well as with the English language in her writing; the Mexican side was evidenced by her use of Spanish diction and her descriptions of heritage cultural relics and traditions.

The language with which people describe and label their world has a dialogic effect on their own cultural positioning (Back, 2013; Bustamante-López, 2009). The vernacular they employ daily influence their thoughts and attitudes about their world. In a monolingual English-speaking school context, students of Mexican descent develop both, social identities, or “how we represent ourselves in the social world” (Bustamante-López, 2009, p.279), and linguistic identities, made up of “the languages we employ to represent ourselves” (pp.279-280). These two facets are not mutually exclusive, as one’s language can also be a part of who she or he is as well. For Maria, both of her social and linguistic identities made her bilingual and bicultural.

In fact, she once told me that “Spanish is a part of me. It’s in my bones” (Interview, October 4, 2014). Even though now English had become her first language, Spanish was always a deeper visceral part of her. She had recently indicated to me that she wanted to be a translator in the future, to work as someone who negotiated between the two vernaculars. Furthermore, as she translanguaged, she also transculturated to bring forth another frame of cultural reference (Comas-Díaz, 2001; Smith, 2003).

In her writing, as she translanguaged and negotiated between these two vernaculars (García & Gaddes, 2012), between these two perspectives of the world (Blommaert, 2010), she expressed her dominant language, English, along with her heritage tongue, Spanish. In her bilingual pieces, even as she expressed her world more descriptively using English, her Spanish diction always articulated an important theme or central idea. For example, in writing *paletas* instead of *popsicles*, Maria activated a different cultural and linguistic acumen to describe her

world in the culture and language of her home and community. Even as she regularly engaged in translations between English and Spanish, as a link between the two languages and cultures, she knew also when to retain a word in its original tongue, for words sometimes loses their essence via translation (Aranda, 2007). Maria's first language was Spanish, and as with many Mexican youths in the U.S., Maria had to learn another language and another culture when she started attending school (Crosnoe, 2005). In negotiating these two languages, in negotiating reality from two sociohistorical frames, she was privy to multiple cultural experiences in her world.

Bridging Her Worlds

In Maria's home, there were numerous reminders of Mexican culture, especially the Michoacán culture from whence her mother came. On the dining room table sat an oval glass plate adorned with avocados of varying green shades, prickly cactus pear, calloused pineapples, bright green chayotes, bruised bananas, and shiny apples. On the walls were an aged enlarged photograph of her grandmother with her maternal aunt, and numerous metallic plaques of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Even though Maria had never set foot inside Mexico, Mexican culture, in its religion, its foods, its music, and its folklore was forever an intricate part of her identity. This was evidenced when she responded, "I'm Mexican," when I first asked her about how she would describe herself. It was also possible that this was how she self-identified to cultural-outsiders in the U.S., but I did see many elements of Mexican culture in her daily life, in her conversations, and also in her composition. Simultaneously, there was also something very "American" about her, from her fascination with U.S. popular culture, to her fluency in American English slangs, and to her celebration of U.S. holidays, like July Fourth and Halloween. In fact, in our more recent

interview, she told me when I repeated my initial question about her cultural identity, “Mexican....well, maybe Mexican American” (Interview, November 16, 2016).

Just as Maria strove to bridge the divide between the U.S. and Mexico, through her composition, she also tried to link her school and home lives so they were equally meaningful, as evidenced by the balanced U.S. and Mexican codes in much of her recent writing. Through such endeavors, Mexican American youths’ “familial ethnic identity interacted with youths’ school contexts to influence youths’ ethnic identity” (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p.180). She also bridged English and Spanish, her outside world and the one inside her neighborhood and home. Inside of herself, her cultural identification was also such a bridge, internalizing both cultures and creating her individualized Mexican American hybridity.

Maria’s cultural identity was hybridized between the dominant southeastern U.S. culture and her heritage Michoacán Mexican culture (Campbell, 2015). In many ways, I saw her cultural positioning as a dialogue between these two cultures among others (Urrieta, 2007), the former the larger context in which she had lived all her life, and the latter constructed from the tales of parents, the activities of her neighbors, and the aura of her home. Through her literate activities, Maria thus assumed varying degrees of cultural affinity and identification.

She engaged in alterities in her cultural affiliation between the dominant southeastern U.S. culture and her heritage Mexican culture (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Sánchez, 1993). Her cultural identity was fluid and dynamic. In this double-voicedness, her Mexican American and U.S. selves engaged in dialogue with each other. The means she navigated among and between these identities was via translanguaging between English and Spanish (García & Wei, 2014, Hornberger & Link, 2012). By assuming these two linguistic consciousnesses simultaneously, she further elucidated that double-voiced sense of the world, conjoining a

double-sided notion of reality. In this way, “the author utilizes[d] now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving [herself] up wholly to either of them; [she made] use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of languages at every point in [her] work” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.314). Or, in some occasions, one perspective prevailed over the other, and in others, the other prevailed.

Conclusion

So, although Maria once professed to be solely Mexican, her literate activities painted a picture of an early adolescent girl that had dual cultural and linguistic positionings. In her poetry and narratives, and her selection of reading texts, her complex, multicultural, multilingual identity was poignantly expressed. I wonder how the languages of our lives mirror, or even assist in constructing, these hybrid realities. Did her bilingual, bicultural writing reveal an identity that was also fluidly translanguaging, transculturing, and transnationing?

Because she lived in a heritage community enclave with predominantly Spanish-speaking parents and neighbors, she felt very connected with her heritage self. Yet, her literate transactions and engagements with school had been mostly in English in the southeastern U.S. Her notions of place and context, the climate and the sounds of English were typical to the South. But, deep within her, the progenies for her concept of the world was always heritage Michoacán Mexican.

Speaking to her, being with her, I got the sense that Maria did assert her Mexican self, her Spanish self, yet also tried to distance herself from the actual place of Mexico. She had no desire to visit her grandparents, relatives, or even her biological father in her heritage nation. The U.S. was a space she had claimed, a space with a different dominant language and aura than her community. In her engagements with language, Maria crossed these domains and authored an

identity that was at times multivoiced and heteroglossic, one that defied traditional cultural parameters. Just as her mother courageously crossed the physical border between Mexico and the U.S., Maria also crossed invisible linguistic and cultural boundaries every day.

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Appendix 1

Table 4.1: Data collected from March 2014 to March 2017

Data Type	Unstructured Observations	Semi-Structured Interviews	Writing Samples
Data Quantity	182 pages of fieldnotes	104 pages of transcripts	112 pages of writing (12 pieces of bilingual poetry)
Data Format	Behavioral notes in heritage culture and dominant culture settings	Recorded in Audacity and transferred to Express Scribe	81 digital 31 hardcopy
Examples	“Flea Market, April 10, 2016, with entire family” “Neighborhood swingset, August 23, 2015”	“Mother’s border crossing” “New Years at their house”	Free-verse poetry Narratives
	“px eats @ restaurant gorditas con pastor, orders in Spanish” “px swings with AA friend, while reading a book”	“And she just ran, and they didn’t caught her though” “Last year was really bad, and the grapes were sour”	“When will I live a better life?” “The mystery of the Haunted House”

Appendix 2:

Table 4.2 Thematic Codes Identified in Writing

Codes	Culture /Race	Gender	Family	Friends	School	Class	Age
Example	White view as a child, Mexican as an adolescent	Strong heroines in her stories	Wrote about fam celebration	Conflicts “True friend”	Wrote about Language Arts class	Poetry about family’s material lack	Described life as parentified child
Cultural Affiliation	both, now more Mexican	more U.S.	more Mexican	more U.S.	more U.S.	more Mexican	more Mexican

Codes	Pop Culture	Geography	Border Crossing	Stress	Cultural Allusions	Tone
Example	<i>The Little Mermaid</i> -based fan fiction	Poetry about neighborhood, about U.S.-Mexican border	“When Will I Live a Better Life” poem about Mexican immigration	Writes about anxiety from family separation	Mexican & U.S. cultural traditions: holidays, songs, movies, etc.	Anxious re: immigration, joyful re: spending time with family
Cultural Affiliation	more U.S.	more Mexican	more Mexican	more Mexican	both	more Mexican

Codes	Reading	Writing	Metaphors	Spanish Language Influences
Example	Fan-fiction based on books	writing about writing: “Write to document the stages in my life” using English	Comparing tamales to ice cream, Christmas to a rollercoaster	Spanish text connoting different tone
Cultural Affiliation	more U.S.	more U.S.	both	Mexican

**CHAPTER 5: MULTILAYERED IDENTITY INTERSECTIONS
OF A MEXICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT GIRL¹⁴**

¹⁴ Zhou, Xiaodi. To be submitted to the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*

Abstract

This paper deals with the intersectionality of one early adolescent Mexican American girl's multiple identities. Through a three-year narrative inquiry of her literate experiences, her multiple compounding and simultaneous positionalities are described. By teasing out narrative codes from her observations, interviews, and writing, these codes' intersections were characterized. This article uses Núñez' (2014) notion of intersectionality, specifically as it pertains to the Latinx population, with factors such as documentation status and nation of origin. These intersections' effects on her agency and self-esteem were hypothesized. The overlapping identities form notions of power and limitations.

Keywords: intersectionality, early adolescent, Mexican American girl, narrative inquiry, literate experiences, Núñez, overlapping identities

Multilayered Identity Intersections of A Mexican American Adolescent Girl

On a brisk autumn afternoon, I watched a fourteen year-old Mexican American girl tread purposively off the bus with a faded yellow and blue Despicable Me book-bag on her back. The wind was strong today, steadily howling against her. Now in the eighth grade, she brought home textbooks, binders, assignment books, and stationary- a plastic protractor, pens, highlighters, white-out, and a scientific calculator. Even with the rambunctious movement of children to their respective homes, there was an unspoken solitude, a silence that pervaded the landscape. A deafening anxiety characterized this space inhabited predominantly by undocumented Mexican immigrant families, who dared not even seek medical treatment in fear of discovery.

As the oldest child, a U.S.-born daughter, from a Mexican family of five children with undocumented parents, Maria's shoulders bore a heavy burden from the litany of factors that compounded her existence (Núñez, 2014; Orellana, 2009). First as a Mexican American, she dealt with cultural demands from her heritage family culture and the dominant U.S. context. Also, as an early adolescent middle-schooler, Maria contended with multiple stressors and identity-formation needs that strove for her attention (Vadeboncouer & Stevens, 2005). This age was typically one of change and growth, both in terms of how the youth sees the world and how one sees oneself. Furthermore, as a girl, she was at times subject to sexual aggression, objectification, and discrimination, and her experiences were often muted by the dominant majority and the heritage culture of her neighborhood setting. As a result, many young women "either internalize the male reality or find themselves silenced" (Kamler, 2001, p.153). Other times, she had also found strength in her womanhood, and learned to view her gender as an asset to her existence.

Maria lived in the rural U.S. South, a region traditionally viewed as less socially progressive and displaying greater xenophobia, which in recent years had become a new destination for many of these Latinx¹⁵ immigrants (Johnson & Zipperer, 2007; Marrow, 2011; Stephen, 2015). Yet, with more stringent policy factors, such as “increasing restrictions on access to jobs, higher education, health care, and political participation, [Mexican American] newcomers and their children in the rural South now face far more serious prospects for marginalization and disenfranchisement” (Marrow, 2011, p.252). This geographical space also affected Maria’s ethnic identity attitudes and expressions.

When I asked Maria to describe herself culturally, she usually responded, “Mexican.” On one occasion, she furrowed her brows for a few seconds, and added, “Well...maybe Mexican American” (Interview, October 5, 2016). Her “well” was drawn out with a Southern twain. Many scholars have commented on this strained type of cultural identity in today’s transcultural, globalized community (e.g., Bhabha, 1991, Gonzales, 2005, Ong, 1996, 1999). In fact, Abu El-Haj (2009) explicitly described how one may feel disparate disharmonious allegiances, because for immigrants or minorities, “belonging frequently entails developing one’s sense of identity in relations to multiple nation-states” (p. 277). As Maria developed, her display of cultural and national or regional identification had also been shifting. From our conversations and her outright disdain for the xenophobic message of certain political leaders, Maria felt very strongly about her Mexican heritage. When I entered her house, the high-pitched pulse of brass Mariachi and Ranchera music would frequently hit me, and the scent of sweet and spicy pork used in tamales would fill the heavy air of the small abode.

¹⁵ van Horne’s (2016) gender neutral referent to people of Latin American ancestry

In school, she often learned to identify with other oppressed minority groups through writing. As Maria came to know more about her world, about the history of humanity, she had also assumed other ethnic identities. For example, when her class was learning about World War Two and the Holocaust, she wrote this piece:

Where are they taking me,
I am afraid,
That I might die like others,
Why?
That's the question
I've been asking myself for years
Why is this war still going on?
What is wrong with the nazis
What have us Jews done to them
When will I be free from all this cruelty.
When? (September 5, 2014)

In this poem, Maria wrote as a Jewish person being abducted by the Nazis. Her anxiety in this poem was characterized by a steady stream of questions. Yet, these sentiments also mirrored her own feelings about the antagonism against Mexican immigrants promulgated by Donald Trump in his presidential campaign (Dutton, 2016). She had in fact written in another piece about how she felt like a second-class citizen in the wake of Trump's xenophobic message. She indicated to me that this feeling was one of the reasons she asserted her Spanish linguistic and cultural consciousness in her writing, to upset a single-voiced U.S. perspective (Jiménez, 2007).

In fact, in this age of globalization (Blommaert, 2010; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), we are experiencing superdiverse realities of cultures and languages (Blommaert, 2013; Vertovec, 2013). Individuals living in this era, especially multicultural, multilingual adolescents, can experience multiple realities simultaneously. In this globalized reality, personified by her

family's cross-national existence, Maria interacted with her world in such superdiverse ways. Her cultural perspectives also dialogued with other identity factors in her life, compounding her sense of self to be aligned with other oppressed peoples not from a Mexican heritage.

This study investigated the multiple intersectional factors that contributed to a Mexican American early adolescent girl's ethnic cultural identity (Núñez, 2014). My three research questions were as follows. How had my participant's family and community affected Maria, a Mexican American early adolescent's cultural identity as expressed in interviews, observations, and writing? How might have her literacy experiences dialogically contributed to the construction and manifestation of her cultural identities of the southeastern U.S. and her heritage culture? And, how did her Mexican American ethnic identity intersect with factors such as gender, developmental age, geographical region, other cultures (e.g., White American culture, Black American culture, Asian American culture, etc.), social class, spirituality, and popular culture? In the following, I state my theoretical perspective, followed by the study design itself, and then the discussion of the findings.

Theoretical Framework

One's multiple representations all intersect with hir¹⁶ ethnic cultural identity (Crenshaw, 1998; Núñez, 2014), from hir gender identities to one's geographical identities, from hir developmental identities to hir spiritual and popular culture identities. Ze¹⁷ may don multifarious frames with each of these positionings (Hermans, 2001; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loons, 1992), hir identities multiple and dynamic. These components all intersect and are affected by hir ethnic cultural consciousness, as showcased via hir oral and written expressions.

¹⁶ Rawson's (2010) gender-neutral possessive pronoun instead of his/her

¹⁷ Rawson's (2010) gender-neutral pronoun instead of she/he

Intersectionality “provides a useful conceptual approach to guide inquiry about how variations in social identities and societal contexts shape Latin[x]...success” (Núñez, 2014, p.34). Multiple social identities, or *I*-positions (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loons, 1992), intersect in one individual, so that hir frames of reference become fluid and multiple, assuming various positionalities depending on the social context. In fact, an individual may don different frames, divergent *I*-positions, with which to engage with the world. This conceptualization frees the self “to move, as in a space, from one position to the other in accordance with changes in situation and time” (p.28), as the self “has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established” (p.28). One may have different senses of being in each cultural context, from the dominant majority cultural and linguistic context of school and the predominantly heritage cultural and linguistic context of home, and everything in between.

Distinct perspectives engage in dialogic interaction with each other, expanding even to global cultural *I*-positions in the current interconnected era (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). So, these *I*-positions or perspectives are not only limited to social spaces, but also relate to national or ethnic cultural senses of being. In any of these social contexts, elements of a heritage identity and that of the majority culture U.S. identity manifest and engage dialogically with each other (Bakhtin, 1986). As one learns more about the world, ze can don different cultural perspectives, such as that of a Jewish person during the Holocaust or of an African slave during the Atlantic slave trade. This dialogue encompasses all hir different cultural positionings, as well as the intersectionality of other social, familial, socioeconomic, developmental, and gendered identities (Núñez, 2014). Intersectionality also allows for “variability within categories – for

example, gender within race” (p.50). Each category of identity becomes overlapping, hybrid, and variegated.

For example, although documentation status is discussed in terms of how discourse can “shape the historical portrayal and experiences of undocumented students in K-12 and higher education” (Núñez, 2014, p.73), the specific influence of their documentation status is not discussed as an intersecting factor. The stresses and the present lived realities derived from this status, unlike their gender, race, and class, have not been specifically addressed in literature. Since my study focused on one Mexican American girl from an undocumented family, her family’s documentation was a salient, acute intersection.

For an individual, her literacy experiences, especially written composition, can serve as intersection between multiple marginalized identities (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Crenshaw, 1998). In studying an early adolescent Mexican American girl, for instance, one might take intersectionality into consideration to adequately encompass the totality of her experiences. Her ethnic identity of being a Mexican American and her gender of being a girl invoke “various social contexts and systems of interlocking oppression, such as those of racism and sexism” (Núñez, 2014, p.34). Compounding factors such as birth order, family’s socioeconomic status, home environment, family documentation status, family dynamics, and social support, all affect her sense of self. Such people’s literate worlds depict the “hybrid language practices of adolescent peer groups... and [accentuate] the importance of these practices for articulating ties to immigrant origins and adolescent subcultures” (García-Sánchez 2010, p.525).

In fact, the concept of distinct and homogenous cultures which are set against one another may altogether be antiquated (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010), and instead need to be replaced by cultural intersections and interfaces. These frontiers of culture that manifest

particularly in the identities of immigrants and their children are often hybrid (e.g., Bhabha 1991, Gonzales 2005), a blend of different culturally-oriented positionalities, or transnational (e.g., Basch, Schiller, & Blanc 2000, Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt 1999, Vertovec 2001), vacillating allegiances of geopolitical reference. I view these spaces as those of dialogic interaction (Bakhtin 1981, 1986), where multifaceted hybrid realities encounter and struggle with each other.

Method

In order to investigate the intersectionality of Maria's identity, I conducted a narrative inquiry of my participant's life and how her literacy experiences interacted with her lived cultural context as expressed in observations, interviews, and her writing (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). The methodology I employed was a single qualitative case study that lasted three years (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), which allowed for in-depth exploration of her lived experiences and her transactions with literacy. I utilized this method because of my "interest in the *local particulars* of some abstract phenomenon" (pp.2-3, emphasis in original), namely how the cultural positionings of an early adolescent Mexican American girl in an undocumented family in the southeastern U.S. influenced and was influenced by her literacies. This study was idiographic in nature in that I sought to "describe, explain, or interpret a particular 'case' and which [could] be either inductive or theory-guided" (Levy, 2008, p.3). Via such a method, I intended "to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioural conditions through the actor's perspective" (Zainal, 2007, para. 1).

Data Collection

I was the sole researcher in this study, as I observed her familial interactions and literacy behaviors at her home over the course of the entire research, from March 2014 to March 2017,

approximately once every two months over the span of each school-year when I also conducted altogether twelve recorded one-hour long semi-structured interviews. She was in the fifth grade during the initiation of my study, and in the eighth grade when I concluded. I spent a total of more than 600 hours with Maria, and over 250 hours also with her family. I observed her on excursions during these visits when I would take her and her sisters to the park, to the mall, or to a fast food restaurant with the consent of her mother. During this time, I also collected her writing, both digitally and in hard-copy. In all, I collected 182 pages of observation notes on freehand, composed 104 pages of interview transcripts, and garnered 112 pages of writing, 81 of them digital and 31 on paper in a black and white composition notebook given to her at a summer writing camp, which she used to compose much of her writing for leisure. I password encrypted all writing and audio files and saved them onto my desktop. I stored her notebook in a locked drawer in my apartment.

Hour-long unstructured observations (Mulhall, 2002) occurred at her home and in the community on days of interviews, where I would take rough field notes in pen on a Mead notebook I carried. Such observations at times involved me as a complete participant, meaning when I was engaged with her, such as when we would play soccer in the field outside her home, to a complete observer. This type of data collection was subject to researcher biases, so I took care in recording behavioral notes and certain speech, and member checked them with my participant afterwards on the same day (Roulston, 2010). They also occurred in dominant cultural settings, like the mall or at the ice cream shop two minutes from their home where I would go with the family or, on three occasions (January 25, 2015, September 7, 2016, and October 5, 2016) I took Maria and her two younger sisters to the ice cream shop by myself with the consent of her mother.

In all observations, I noted her interpersonal interactions, and wrote down some of her speech. I looked at how she interacted with ethnic cultural-insiders, ethnic cultural-outsiders, with family members, with acquaintances, with strangers, with different genders and ages, and those of different socioeconomic statuses. In addition, I noted which language she spoke during these interactions. I was careful to note the setting, the date, and context of the observation, such as “A Catholic church, Some City, USA, September 11, 2016; A Catholic Sunday Mass with entire family.” I also documented her engagements with literacy, such as when, how, and where she read and wrote. For example, I once tagged, “April 5th, 2016; poetry on Chromebook; bedroom by herself.” I kept my observation notebook in the same locked drawer as her writing notebook.

The hour-long interviews were semi-structured (Flynn, 2005), wherein I had a general direction of the dialogue, “but the conversation [was] free to vary, and [was] likely to change substantially” depending on my participant’s responses (p.65). Our interviews addressed topics that ranged from her cultural attitudes, interactions with the dominant culture, activities in which she and her friends and family engaged, such as heritage and community celebrations, her feelings about reading and writing, to her thoughts about politics. Before conducting the interviews, I prepared a list of questions, but given the semi-structured nature of the proceedings, I did not always follow them strictly, and allowed my participant to address and describe tangential material as well, such as an anecdote or related background information.

We conducted all our interviews at her home. They were audio-recorded via Audacity software on my laptop as MP3 files, which were then exported to Express Scribe software as WAV files to be played back and transcribed on the latter, because Express Scribe allowed greater attention to mechanics of the transcription process. Transcription followed conventions,

such as time markers, single-spaced speech with double spacing between change of speakers, and characterization of pause and overlapping speech (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). All audio files were password encrypted. The transcripts were composed in Microsoft Word, were dated and password encrypted, and then stored in a folder on my computer.

Ongoing during my visits was also the collection of her writing, which she shared both digitally and in hard-copy. Four digital writing samples were emailed to my Gmail mailbox, including her writings about Donald Trump (received September 25, 2016) and three poems (received February 22, 2016, August 7, 2016, and October 31, 2016). For the rest of the school writing samples, she shared her class Google Drive, which gave me access to her school writing assignments. I chose to study in depth 45 typed pieces of school assignments spanning fifth to eighth grades totaling 39 pages, mostly prose that addressed a certain topic, such as in sixth grade, prompts like “Do you think your school should have a vending machine” or “Do you wish the world was safer and cleaner,” and reading analyses, such as a double-entry reading journal of Rebecca Stead’s *When You Reach Me*, where certain paginated excerpts were documented and paired with her reading response. The pieces were chosen because they expressed one of the components of her cultural identity, later addressed in the analysis.

For school, I also digitally acquired through her Google Drive 34 pages of her typed pre-writing notes and reactions to texts on dated pieces spanning sixth through eighth grades, titled “Brain Cranks,” which were common generic writing phrases, notes about readings, and feelings about particular websites that catered to literacy. I obtained six typed assignments of free-verse poetry done regarding different topics. I also collected her writing done for the a writing camp in the summer of 2014, totaling 41 pieces spanning 31 pages. These pieces were around 150 words each. Finally, I also assigned four short one-paragraph writing responses to prompts, one every

month from September to December of 2016. She could write in the language and genre of her choice. She wrote in English only for both, and chose an essay for the first prompt and poetry for the second¹⁸.

Data Analysis

Concurrent during data collection were analyses of these three forms of data. I engaged in multiple readings of data sets- of interviews, observations, and writing samples. These data spoke to one another, each influencing the coding and interpretation of each other form. I coded my observations according to themes I drew from the interview transcripts, and vice versa. In reviewing the data, as I sorted through the narratives of my participant, both written and spoken, her stories began to “invoke the process and tensions often present in gathering data” (Dickson, 2011, p.85). I used the software ATLAS.ti (Friese, 2014) to identify narrative themes in my transcripts, writing samples, and observations, and used an open coding system, which meant I developed thematic codes based on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also drew on the intersectionality of Núñez (2014) as I conceived how such expressions of parsed and overlapping codes came together to form an individual’s cultural identity. Sometimes, I found some of these intersections blended smoothly, and in other areas, multiple identities were partitioned and bordered.

In analyzing the interviews and observations, I noted displays of culture- heritage, majority, and other minority cultural affiliations. For instance, she liked watching anime, which was more consistent with a Japanese cultural orientation (MacWilliams, 2008). In total, I found culture was discussed in each of the twelve interview transcript, having a major role in six of the interviews in constituting a plurality of all participant utterances. Literacy was next, playing a

¹⁸ Refer to Appendix 1

major role in three of the interviews. Family was next most discussed topic, having a dominant role in two of the interviews. The last interview's focus was politics, with Donald Trump's presidency and contingent political issues, such as immigration and police brutality, the central topics.

After transcription of the twelve interviews, totaling 104 pages, I went back over them to code them for narrative themes (Reissman, 2005). These themes were identified due to the repeated occurrence of words (e.g., sisters) or ideas (e.g., family). The themes in her speech were member checked with my participant when I brought back the transcripts of the interviews, usually three weeks after the interview, to confer with her whether those codes encompassed her intended meanings (Roulston, 2010). There was additional talk data surrounding or describing these themes, for example, the description of how she hid her writing under her bed for her sisters to read. Often times, as with the previous instance, different codes occurred simultaneously, such as Family with Writing. Such concurrence was coded then as an intersection of Family and Writing.

Additional codes accrued with successive utterances or interviews as novel topics were discussed, such as the idea of border-crossing after a conversation about Mexican immigration to the U.S. I then checked in prior transcripts for evidence of these new themes. I then looked for such common themes over the other data types, such as her writing samples and observations. In an iterative analytic design, I repeatedly looked over previous data sets when new codes were found, and modified and recoded prior data (Yin, 1994). I coded the observation data first, then the interviews, and finally the writing. The preliminary codes were developed from observations (e.g., culture/race, gender, literacy, developmental age), further codes were developed from

interviews (e.g., border-crossing, stress, politics), and still more codes from review of her writing (e.g., Spanish language influences, metaphors, genre).

I used a thematic narrative analysis of data codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In such thematic analyses, the emphasis is usually on the content of the expressions (Reissman, 2005). In my analyses, there was attention to the participant's explicitly stated themes, and additionally, the "approach is useful for theorizing across a number of cases – finding common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report" (p.3). Upon coding each set of data, I looked across sets, and identified patterns or inconsistencies. In analyses of the codes, I first analyzed interviews, then observations, and then her writing. Thematic analysis can also entail the use of grounded theory and narrative analysis, and prioritizes the researcher's own discretion in selection, interpretation, and dissemination of the data. In such studies, the theory of the researcher can arise from examination of the data itself.

If a theme occurred more than three times and over at least two different instances in writing samples, interview occasions and/or observation attempts, then it was considered significant. For instance, I identified Culture/Race, Gender, Family, Friends, Developmental Age, Language, Reading, Writing, Class, and Pop Culture as salient codes for observations. I identified the following codes for my participant's interviews – Culture/Race, Gender, Family, Friends, School, Class, Developmental Age, Language, Reading, Writing, Class, Pop Culture, Geography, Border Crossing, and Stress¹⁹. I added some additional refinements of codes when necessary for a specific conversation, such as Cultural Attitudes as a subcategory of Culture/Race in one interview. I color-coded my transcripts digitally by highlighting noted portions by color according to these themes with a legend at the top of the transcripts. I

¹⁹ Analysis procedures pictured in Appendix 2

thematically coded the written specimen in all of codes of the interviews and observations, with additional markers specific to writing, such as Cultural Allusions, Metaphors, Genre, and Spanish Language Influences.

In her writing, I also looked at diction, language (e.g., English or Spanish), and themes, and drew connections to either her heritage culture or the dominant U.S. culture. For example, I attributed elements of Mexican folklore to her Mexican identity. Her writing about the history of U.S. slavery or about Disney characters was more consistent with her U.S. identity. Also, her use of Spanish was tied to her Mexican heritage, while her use of English connected to her education and life in the U.S. Thus, the style and content of her writing both related to her cultural identity. The intersectionality of her various identities were coded for greater or lesser cultural identification, either her heritage culture or the majority host culture. In such analyses of my data, I was able to pick out certain text, speech, or behaviors that spoke to a particular idea or to a particular research question. I also identified the genre of her writing, which consisted of Narratives, Poetry, Essays, and Reading Responses.

Intersectionality was operationalized as the concurrence of two or more codes in a single chunk of data. In a chart, one axis had Heritage Culture, followed by Spanish Language, Writing, Gender, Age, Friends, SES, Popular Culture, Family, Region, Spirituality, and Other Cultures. The other axis had Dominant Culture, followed by English Language and the same codes. The concurrent presence or overlap of colors was evidence of an intersection. A chunk of data was defined as one activity during an observation, one complete description of an event or commentary in interviews, or one piece of writing. So, if one code, such as Family, was repeated in a transcript portion along, or simultaneous, with the code for Culture and/or Writing, then this was noted as an intersection. Such intersections were tabulated and documented in my notes.

When the same intersection was repeated across data collection instances, such as on two different dates, then it gained in significance. Finally, when one such intersectionality occurred across multiple data sets, such as in interviews and writing, or in observations, interviews, and writing, on multiple dates, then this intersection was considered very significant. For instance, the Culture, Class, & Gender Intersection occurred 64 times across all three data sets, Culture, Developmental Age, and Language Intersection occurred 59 times across all three data sets, and Gender, Popular Culture, and Developmental Age occurred 53 times across all data. The latter two intersections were further categorized as Border Crossing Negotiations, and Girlhood and Womanhood Negotiations, respectively. I then used theory (e.g., Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007, Bakhtin, 1986, Núñez, 2014) to describe these intersections²⁰.

Findings

After examining the intersections of these codes, I found her cultural identity affected and influenced expressions of her many other *I*-positions (Hermans, 2001). The effect of this intersection (Núñez, 2014), of this dialogue of identities, was writing, speech, and behavior that were in between linguistic, cultural, and developmental worlds (see the coding procedure in Appendix 1).

Culture, Class and Gender Intersections

In fact, the “multidimensional lens afforded by intersectionality...makes it an especially promising conceptual framework to address educational equity, especially among Hispanics and Latin[x]s in the United States” (Núñez, 2014, p.86). In my observations, and through her writing and interviews, I found all other factors in Maria’s life intersected with her cultural identity. Her ethnic cultural identity was actually evolving during my time with her, as her self-identification

²⁰ Refer to Appendix 2

had changed from when we had our first conversation in the fifth grade to our most recent in the eighth grade. When I first asked her how she felt culturally in the fifth grade, she told me, “More Mexican...like when we celebrate holidays. Sometimes, we celebrate Día de los Reyes. That’s like the three kings of Mexico that founded the site of them” (Interview, March 16, 2014). In the context of rich heritage cultural traditions, Maria self-identified as Mexican. Of course, this identification could also have been due to the fact that she viewed me as a cultural outsider, and she only identified as such for my benefit. In fact, I did see markers of U.S. cultural elements, from the Disney toys and reading selections, to her choice in U.S. popular music.

Two and a half years later, in the eighth grade, Maria gave a different response to the same question: “Well, both. At times, like when I can speak another language and help my family out, or someone else that doesn’t speak English. So, I like that part about being Mexican American” (Interview, October 5, 2016). Maria now professed feeling both Mexican and American, about her U.S. identity and English proficiency benefiting her family and heritage community. But, from my observations, I have actually noted a greater gravitation to her Mexican or ethnic minority identity when I coded my observation field notes and interviews. In fact, in recent months, she took a critical stance even displaying some resentment towards the White culture. For example, she told me:

I feel like colored people are more powerless than White people. White people have more...not rights, but they have more accessibility to better things. And, there are more colored people that work a lot harder than White people, but White people still have better options. (Interview, September 14, 2016)

This excerpt was coded as Cultural Attitudes and Socioeconomic Class. She was becoming aware of the realities of the world, about the relationship between race and class, and her place in

her context as a colored person. These sentiments coincided with Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric about Mexican immigrants stealing domestic U.S. jobs and committing crimes (Barbero, Burns, Haberman, & Semple, 2016). These feelings were especially acute because her family was undocumented, and was the target of Trump's deportation threats.

Experience of class.

As evidenced by the above excerpt, compounding Maria's perception of culture was also hers and her family's sense of socioeconomic status (Núñez, 2014). In conversations and in her writing, the issue of class came up often. She would take on household chores, like cooking and cleaning, so her mom could tend to the neighbors' children to earn some extra income. She seldom got to spend much time with her stepfather, because he worked two jobs, the day shift at the local Mexican grocery, and nights at the poultry processing plant. On Christmas and birthdays, the neighborhood clubhouse run by university faculty would donate books, toys, and dolls as presents. The local Food Bank also provided groceries to neighborhood families every so often. Maria's family needed all the support they could get with a growing family of two adults and five children, four of whom were school-aged. Her literacy also intersected with her experience of class. For example, in her reading experiences, she identified with characters like Katniss from *The Hunger Games* and Lydia from *The Child of the Mountains*, young female protagonists who both come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. She liked their strength and resiliency, and enjoyed reading about how they overcame their economic hardships.

On February 22, 2015, Maria wrote an untitled, bilingual poem about her state of mind and her family's economics:

I am one	Yo soy alguien
Who feels	Quien se Siente

lonely and scared	Solitaria y espantada
But even though	Pero
I feel those emotions	Cuando siento esas emociones
I always stand	Siempre me levanto
Up for myself	Por yo misma
Never letting	Nunca dejando
Anyone push me	Que alguien me empuje
From my Hopes	De Mis Emperanzas
Or dreams	O mi suenos
And I am one	Y yo soy alguien
That even though	Que a pesar de que
I might be poor	Soy pobre
Economically	En la economia
But	Pero
Rich in my heart	Rica en mi corazon
And	Y
I will <u>always</u> have	Yo <u>Siempre</u> tendre
My head raised	Mi cabeza elevar
Up	Ariba
Not Down	No abajo
'Cause I am one	Porque Yo soy alguien
That has pride	Que tiene orgullo
In my heritage	En mi Herencia
Not shame	No verguenza
And	Y
I am a	Soy una
Human- being	Ser-Humano

I identified Socioeconomic Class and Culture/Race as dominant themes in this piece. Phrases such as “stand / up for myself,” “hopes and dreams,” “poor / economically/ but rich in my heart,” and “I always have / my head raised/ up/ not down,” all deal with her sense of her class. She

existed in a lower position with respects to class, and this poem raised her up. She described how she had “pride in [her] heritage not shame.” Via this poem, she expressed the effects of her family’s material lack, even as a threat to her own sense of self-worth and pride in her heritage culture.

She had in conversations with me explicitly tied one’s socioeconomic status to one’s ethnicity. To her, often the issues of socioeconomic class intersected with race. For example, Maria once remarked:

You know how when you’re driving somewhere, and you see a homeless person, the majority of them are White. And, you see colored people, and people of another race, work harder than people that are homeless. I feel like there are more colored people that work a lot harder than White people, but White people still have better options. (Interview, September 14, 2016)

In Maria’s mind, White people made up most of the homeless population, while minorities struggled with low-paying menial jobs to support their families. She also indicated to me that it was not possible for her family to be homeless because they would not be sympathized by society due to their minority ethnicity.

As expressed via her writing and interviews, Maria was aware of her disadvantages in relations to others in the U.S. due to her family’s class. She sometimes used her material lack for inspiration, for impetus to work harder to succeed, as she often wrote about how she would not let her economic lack keep her down. Her goal of being a lawyer, or the president, was in part due to her belief that lawyers or the president have lucrative incomes, and she could then support her family materially, suggesting she felt responsible for her family. In fact, despite their financial struggles, Maria’s parents still sent money back to their families in Mexico. When I

asked her about her future plans, she replied: “What I’m planning to do is to go to college. I mean *get a scholarship*, go to college, and be a lawyer. That’s all my plan.” (Interview, July 26, 2014). Each time she spoke about her college intentions, she always added the need to obtain a scholarship beforehand because she knew she required external monetary assistance for college.

In her writing, this need to financially support her own education was a key motivation to do well in schools. Even in an excerpt from an essay arguing for the importance of completing one’s homework, she wrote:

One thing you need in the future is a job. If you get a good job, they will be able to choose you, and give you lots of money. Once you’re in high school, you might get a free scholarship in college so you won’t have to pay that much...Homework will help you in real life by getting a good job, maybe at a bank, teaching children, being a president, and also starting a business. You can start a business about learning the things you know by doing your homework. (May 5, 2014)

In this composition, I identified themes of Socioeconomic Class and School, as she emphasized the importance of finishing one’s homework was the financial benefits from excelling in school and procuring a college scholarship. A college education, then, became a pathway to “getting a good job, maybe at a bank, teaching children, being president, and also starting a business.” Here, she also stated that one result of having a job was the “lots of money” it would provide.

This socioeconomic mobility was also what her family and heritage community prized, and for them, education attainment was the most effective means to financial success (Carrillo & Rodriguez, 2016; Gonzales, Borders, Hines, Villaba, & Henderson, 2013). Many first-generation Mexican families in the U.S. tended to highly value their children’s education, even though some

parents themselves never had the opportunity to even matriculate beyond elementary school.

These parents often had to work at an early age to help their own parents support their families.

Perception of outside cultures.

But, to conceive of her world as dichotomous between the dominant U.S. culture and her heritage Mexican culture would be simplistic in excluding other cultural influences. In her cultural world, there were not only the Mexican and the majority U.S. cultures, but also intersections of African American, Asian American, and Jewish cultures among others. She was aware of these other cultures as she lived with African American neighbors, and her social studies and language arts curriculums often addressed other minority cultures. Such was one of the dominant trends in schools, of integrating social studies with language arts education (National Governor Association for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Maria regularly meshed her social understanding with her literacy, particularly via written composition.

The genre she most often used to describe minority cultures was poetry. In her poetic pieces, she even assumed the identity of these other cultures, such as the previous poems about the Holocaust. When Maria's class studied the history of slavery in the U.S., she wrote a poem from an African American perspective:

Why?

What is wrong with me.

It is like I am an outsider.

No one likes me.

Just cause I am African-American.

I am a human being not a rag doll

Why has my family been sold?

Why?

Why can't we just be treated like humans?

WHY? (September 12, 2014)

In this piece, coded with Culture and Family, she assumed the identity of an African American slave, dehumanized and treated like an outsider. Two poignant themes in this piece: family and humanity were issues pertinent to Maria's own life, with fears of family separation while feeling dehumanized coming from an undocumented family.

Just as with her earlier piece about the Holocaust, Maria positioned herself as the oppressed in the context she studied. With exposure to such depictions of the White culture, Maria had even developed an antipathy to this majority culture:

I feel some, *some* White people are racist, like Donald Trump...At one time, I did hate White people because they're always let off the hook easier than other people are. It's more Black people getting shot, or more Hispanics getting shot by police brutality. White people get let off the hook. They aren't as harmed as colored people are, and they're...like everyone just sees them as good. And, they're really not. (Interview, September 14, 2016).

In this excerpt, I identified codes of Culture/Race and Cultural Attitudes. Maria felt this way to some extent, blaming systemic racism for social inequalities. She made some sweeping claims regarding White people: that they are seen as good, but in actuality, they are not, and that they are often let off the hook when they commit crimes. She painted society as giving undue advantages to White people, and advocated for the plight of colored people. Yet at the same time, she was also influenced by a racist heritage community that looked down on African Americans and Asians as well.

I asked her about her interactions with other ethnicities, and she responded, “Yeah, I also have Asian friends. They’re nice. They’d be different. Like, I would act nicer with Asians than I would with other types of friends. My *other* friends would act meaner towards them than with other people” (Interview, September 14, 2016). She presented herself as more benevolent to Asians while her friends may deride them. In fact, being Asian, I had noticed her compassion in relations to some of her peers in the neighborhood. Whereas some of the other children in her community did call me racist names at times, Maria never did so, and instead judged those actions to be harmful.

She had egalitarian views of society, as expressed via her writing. For instance, she wrote for a Martin Luther Day fifth grade school assignment about the need for greater cultural equality in society, for people to be treated the same regardless of skin color:

Do you have a dream? Well I do. My dream is that everyone should be treated equally and not judged by the color of thier skin. My dream is that everyone should be treated equally because it’s very important to be treated fair. My next reason is that everyone should not be judged by how they look (January 20, 2014).

In this excerpt, I found Cultural Attitudes again, as she wrote about the importance of equal treatment regardless of appearances. I saw her writing depict an egalitarian stance, yet, per her spoken conversations, she had these perceptions of distinctions based solely on race. Thus, her writing was likely skewed by the climate of the U.S. classroom, where her speech to me was influenced by the culture of her heritage neighborhood where we conducted our interviews.

Experience of own culture.

From my observations, our conversations, and her writing, throughout the years, she had become more assertive of her Mexican heritage. For example, as reaction to Donald Trump's incendiary presidential campaign, Maria wrote an essay lambasting the billionaire's credentials to be president. She depicted his unscrupulous business dealings and his inflammatory rhetoric as grounds for her disapproval. She wrote as further evidence for his unfitness for the position:

Donald Trump believes that Mexican immigrants are rapists, murders and cause big conflict. He also believes that they steal white people's jobs and bring drugs to the U.S.

Although, he claims these beliefs are fact statics will prove him wrong. Most rapes and murders are committed by American citizens born in the U.S. Also the jobs immigrants take are low paying menial jobs that Americans don't want and Mexican immigrants take to support their family.

(July 29, 2015)

In this composition, I noted through her defiant tone as evidenced by the phrase "statistics will prove him wrong" and the fact that she wrote Mexican immigrants took "low paying menial jobs that Americans don't want...to support their family," her defensiveness at the erroneous and hurtful labels cast by Trump. These phrases were coded as Cultural Attitudes. In her refutation, it was clear to me she used her stepfather, mother, and the other adults in her community as grounds to repudiate Trump's claims. Her stepfather worked night shifts at the poultry processing plant and at the Mexican grocery during the days, mostly with other undocumented immigrants and minorities. She saw how her mother worked to clean the house, prepared the meals, and tended to her young siblings and to other neighborhood children for pay. Lastly, Maria knew if she was ever caught doing drugs, her parents would be horrified and incensed.

She ended her essay with these lines:

He's never met any Mexican families or know the reasons they came to the United States. As a Mexican I can say that his comments hurt families and makes them feel like outsiders. If he becomes president it might make it difficult for Mexican families to live the American Dream. (July 29, 2015)

To conclude her passionate essay, she asserted her Mexican cultural identity, arguing that Trump did not truly know any Mexican Americans, yet harmed them with his words. Her ethnicity was a source of pride, resiliency, and defiance. She seldom displayed any shame of her culture, even in light of negative political and societal portrayals.

Role of gender.

Maria's gender was also an important aspect of her identity. In fact, many Mexican American girls' notions of gender are very important to their senses of self, and "an intersectionality framework has been used to explore variations in educational experiences according to gender" with respects to these students (Núñez, 2014, p.85). Her Mexican ethnicity often conflated with her femininity, with being a girl in both her heritage community and the larger Southern U.S. Despite the gender disparities in Mexico, she expressed to me that, in fact, women in Mexico were currently "fighting to be treated the same as men [were] treated" (Interview, September 14, 2016).

She went on to tell me that women in Mexico did not have many economic opportunities, and for most, "there [we]re only certain jobs a girl can do, like sell tacos and stuff." In this way, Maria's cultural identity also intersected with her gender schema and socioeconomic class. In her heritage culture's current views, women were not currently as agentive or as authoritative as those in contemporary U.S. contexts, as in Mexico, whereas men could be found in *la calle* ("the

street,” i.e., the public domain), women were often relegated to *la casa* (“the home,” i.e., the domestic domain) (“Changing role of gender,” 2009).

I found her gender to coincide with her reading, but not with her writing. For example, she expressed in one interview:

I like to read books about young adult novels. Most of the books I read is about how society treats girls in general. And, how it’s described how the perfect girl should be athletic and things like that. And, some girls can’t achieve that. That’s like the kinds of books I read” (Interview, September 14, 2016).

So, she indicated her affinity for reading texts about girls, and particularly of the effect of societal expectations on girls. She stated she liked to read about “how the perfect girl should be,” and about the inability of some to achieve that perfection. In her literacy, she often gravitated towards narratives with strong female protagonists, such as Katniss in *The Hunger Games* and Maleeka in *The Skin I’m In*. She may not have explicitly been aware of her gender as a factor in her writing, even though in every one of her own written narratives, the protagonist was also a girl, a girl who usually discovered she was more than she once believed.

But, I could not find in many of her writing the specific influences of gender. When I asked why she rarely wrote about her own girlhood, she told me, “I don’t usually write about being a girl. I write more about my race” (Interview, September 26, 2016). However, even as her heritage community had a detrimental effect on her self-efficacy and pride in being a girl, her familial support gave her strength in her gender identity. I could see the dichotomy of a more feminist family context and a patriarchal community context, for even though her parents still displayed traditional gender roles, they encouraged her to dream big and to be economically and emotionally independent.

But concepts of gender differed in relations to her different cultural frames, as in contemporary U.S. society there is a relatively more egalitarian, pro-feminist movement, despite the gender gap in terms of salary and promotion as well as the subjectivism and discrimination still experienced by many women. Maria's notion of womanhood was complex. She viewed some as strong and agentive, "like, some women are fighters; there are some women that are lawyers, and they're fighting to get equal rights" (Interview, September 14, 2016). However, she was also reminded that for other women, like those in Mexico, there were limited economic opportunities.

Her own gender identity was that of a girl, which was sometimes oppositional to boys. She did not reveal to me any attractions to boys, although I know she had dated one other boy who also lived in the neighborhood. Back in the sixth grade, she spoke to me about her Spanish class, which consisted mostly of boys:

I was going to go to a special Spanish class, but my teacher is a boy. There's a girl teacher. She's advanced, and I'm in regular. But, I might switch over to the advanced. And, I'm the only girl in that class. I have to deal with...*boys*. And the teacher's a boy, so I have to deal with like 20 boys. And I'm the only girl. Well, there's no one to talk to. I mean, I have to deal with boys, who are the most annoying boys in the whole school. I have to sit next them too. (Interview, January 15, 2015)

I coded this excerpt as Gender Identity. With statements such as "I have to deal with...*boys*," "I'm the only girl," "most annoying boys in the whole school" and "I have to sit next to them too," she expressed an antagonistic tone towards boys in her speech. She sounded isolated and irritated when surrounded by them.

Being a girl also influenced how others saw her and how she saw herself. Often, I have found those external factors subsumed her internal views. Mexican American girls, in particular, often needed to negotiate between their community's traditional patriarchal views of femininity with their own critical and complex views of womanhood (Denner & Dunbar, 2004). For example, playing soccer was an activity Maria took pride in, but when a boy in her neighborhood told her girls could not play soccer, she stopped: "He crushed my dreams. He's all like, 'Girls can't play soccer at all.' So, I stopped playing soccer" (Interview, October 5, 2016). In a sad self-fulfilling prophecy, she let go of her athletic dreams.

Even within her own family, traditional gender roles existed, as her stepfather worked two jobs so that her mother could stay home and care for the children and perform household chores. These gender roles were consistent with conventional Mexican attitudes that still had traces of machismo and patriarchal authority (Galanti, 2016; Gerson & Gonzales, 2001). However, her mother always told her to be anything she wanted to be, and stressed her academics, even though she herself only had an elementary education before needing to leave school to help her father, Maria's grandfather, in the fields in Michoacán in southern Mexico.

Maria spoke about her mother's childhood: "Well, she had to get out of school to help my grandma. And, she would have to, because my grandfather worked out in the farms, she would have to go out every day, and take him food and help him in the fields. She could do that, but my uncles, they could go to school" (Interview, September 14, 2016). So, her mother, because she was a woman, had to sacrifice her school aspirations for her family. Like the tragic, altruistic heroines of Mexican folklores, as a woman, she sacrificed her own goals and dreams for the sake of the family due to her gender (Gerson & Gonzales, 2001). She endured many hardships on her journey to the U.S. to deter such sacrifice for her own girls.

With her mother and stepfather's encouragement, Maria had developed lofty ambitions. She even told me when we were discussing how she felt about politics and Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential candidacy: "I feel like there should be more women in politics. I'm gonna run for president" (Interview, October 5, 2016). Even with such forces that weighed against her agency, with a neighborhood context that attempted to diminish her self-worth, Maria had the highest of aspirations. Whereas she expressed prior that she wanted to be an immigration attorney, current political events had even spurred her to reach for the highest political office in the land.

Despite such deficit notions of femininity from her heritage community culture, Maria was still strong in her agency and academic performance. This fortitude was partly because her family needed a mature English speaker to navigate the English-speaking context in which they lived. Her family, her mother in particular, had also provided a role model of a strong-willed woman. Having escaped Mexico alone and pregnant with nothing but a carton of water, hounded by coyotes and border patrol, her mother's story of physical and emotional sacrifice had given Maria a model of perseverance (Groody, 2014). Because of this sense of resiliency and agency, she added to her recount of losing her dream of playing soccer with an explanation of why she felt proud to be a girl: "Because they can make changes, like the first woman soccer player. By doing what they want to do, they can make a change" (Interview, October 5, 2016).

Border Crossing

In spite of its chauvinistic gender views, Maria felt pride in her heritage community. At times, for her, her culture was also tied to a particular geographical location, giving place an identity, both culturally and personally. Her sense of place had functioned as an experiential aspect of her identity, which turned her "own internal narratives about educational merit from

individualistic to more community-oriented perspectives” (Núñez, 2014, p.90). In a piece she composed about the geographical space of her neighborhood, she wrote:

*I am from the bright sun in the early mornings
To the loud explosions from fireworks.
From the bells of the paleteros (ice cream cart)
ringing in the afternoons, urging kids to buy the paletas (popsicles)
to the sizzling meat on the grill.
I’m from the red clay river under the bridge where nothing goes
to the spice of candy made from tamarindos (tamarind).
From having social anxiety
to the savory taste of chicharones (deep-fried meat),
I’m from the sizzling paper igniting fire
to the sweet drink of ochettas (sweet drink).
I am from nature where I’m free and wild,
to society where I’m small and quiet. (September 8, 2016)*

In this poem about her neighborhood, she laced Spanish diction with the English poem. I coded this piece as Geography, Culture, and Spanish Language Influences. The theme of place in literacy has been used by language arts instructors to ground a shared space with personal meaning (Bishop, 2004). Teachers have often used George Ella Lyon’s *Where I’m From* poem as mentor text for student productions, to nurture both literacy development and a connection to the community. Such place-conscious pedagogy “teaches a sense of community and gives students a model for living anywhere” (p.69).

Maria’s family lived in the rural southeast, a region fast becoming a new destination for Latinx immigrants (Marrow, 2010). With the influx of migrants and factory workers from Mexico and Central America, the number of unauthorized immigrants in the South today even exceeds the total number of African Americans living in this region during Jim Crow. With this

demographic shift, there has also been a cultural shift, with the arrival of more Mexican and Latin restaurants and the availability of Spanish-speaking channels, such as *Telemundo* and *Univisión*, on network television in this region. Currently, much of the undocumented Mexican population still live in the shadows due to their tentative documentation situations.

Maria's cultural identity was related to her sense of geographical place. She at times viewed her cultures as a bordered space, which characterized many Mexican Americans' sense of cultural identity (Anzaldúa, 1987). She wrote in a piece on February 15, 2015:

<u>When will I live A Better Life?</u>	<u>Cuando Vivere Una Vida Mejor?</u>
I have a dream	Mi sueno es
That one day	Que un dia
I will get to cross	Pueda crusa
The Border	La Frontera
Here I am	Aqui Estoy
Every day	Pero cada dia
It gets worse	Esta Peor
The worst thing	La cosa mas peor
Is that	Es que
In the train	En el tren
"The Beast"	"La Bestia"
There is nothing	No ai nada
To eat or Be warm	Para comer o Para esta caliente
When will the President	Cuando sera que el Presidente
Barack Obama let us	Barack Obama los dejara
Mexicans cross	Nosotros Mexicanos Crussar
The border	La Frontera
And let us live	Y dejar que vivamos

A better life

Una Vida Mejor

That is my dream.

Ese es mi sueño.

In this bilingual, dual-colored poem, she constructed a bordered identity linguistically, culturally, and geographically.

To depict such hybridity, Maria wrote bilingual pieces that constructed her sense of geography. Each language pertained to a cultural and linguistic identity. Indeed, place was of such importance to her, especially coming from a transnational consciousness (Gonzales, 2005). Although her sense of place fluctuated between the U.S. and Mexico, her family and she had never physically ventured out of the state. I asked her the furthest away from home she had ever been, and she answered after thinking for a while, “I think Savannah?” which was less than four hours away by car. So, the only real physical place she had truly known and lived in is the rural community of her town and home, although she also loved reading books set in faraway places and listening to her parents talk about their past lives in Michoacán, Mexico.

Spiritual border crossings.

Here in the U.S., inside her home, there were numerous relics of Mexican Catholicism, of a large mirror plaque of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and portraits of Jesus sitting atop the cupboard. Before dinner, the family took turns saying grace, giving thanks for every aspect of their lives. The family went around the table holding hands, with each child praying as well. Every Sunday, Maria, her parents, and siblings went to a Spanish-speaking Catholic church in a nearby town, after which they would head to the flea market.

Religion was a way the family connected with their heritage culture. Sermons were given in Spanish by a Mexican American priest, who reminded everyone to have faith when times were hard. On this particular day, politics even entered into the fold, as he mentioned Donald Trump,

much to the chagrin of the majority Mexican congregation. The priest asked for compassion, not only from Trump, but also towards him. It was this Christian faith that had given Maria and her family hope in their quest for a better life in the U.S. Each time Maria's mother gazed up at the mural of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico (Moffitt, 2006), she was reminded of her own harrowing journey to the U.S.

Maria recounted her mother's odyssey:

My mom was like, they ran, and the dogs were barking...And then she saw the church, and then they were cold at night. Outside on the roof of the church was a glass painting of *La Virgin de Guadalupe*. Yeah, stained glass. That was the first thing my mom saw. Like, she felt safe when she saw that. And then, *el padre*, the priest, he's like, "You should have told me to- you should have knocked at the door, so I could give you a sweater or blanket." But, then the priest was really good. (Interview, October 20, 2014)

Her mother sought refuge at that church in Texas when she traversed the U.S.-Mexican border. She was one of the few in the group of intrepid migrants to make it safely across the border. Actually Maria was with her mother on this intrepid trek, inside of her swollen belly as an unborn child.

In her composition, Maria often alluded to God. For example, in planning a piece about her brother's birth, she wrote in quotations by his name, Emmanuel, "it means 'God is with us.'" She also spoke of her baby brother being "a present from God," and "the most precious thing in the world." In her actual text, Maria composed this excerpt:

Then I saw a little baby. He was as small as a little owl. My mom named him Edmanuel which means “God is with us”. He was the best most precious present my mom could ever give me. He was born on October 1st, 2012. (July 2, 2013)

God and spirituality seemed tied to pleasant feelings and emotions in her life. For example, in fifth grade, when her class was studying Martin Luther King Jr., she wrote on September 10, 2014, as one of her reasons for her dream of equality:

I have special reasons that we should follow. So that my dream comes true. My first reason is that everyone has rights to be treated just as we are. Everyone is special no matter how they look because each of us are presents from God. Everyone should be allowed to be with whoever they want because everyone should be friends.

Here, Maria argued for equal treatment because everyone in the world was a gift from God, reaffirming the sanctity of life.

On her border-crossing, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe at the church provided salvation for Maria’s mother, being the sole member of her group to make it safely across the border. With the emphasis on the Virgin, Mexico’s Christian beliefs were also hybridized between traditional European elements and indigenous influences (Moffitt, 2006). In this religious narrative, the Virgin Mary appeared before the Mexican peasant Juan Diego. Her appearance as the transnational Christian symbol for the Virgin Mary is miraculous and sacred, personifying the Biblical narrative for many Mexicans, making the religion more relevant and relatable for Mexicans.

In Mexican people’s minds, this persona of indigenous spirituality is “a feminist figure challenging patriarchal society and as a political icon signifying social justice for the poor and

oppressed” (Herrera-Sobek, 2008, p.310). Furthermore, the fact that Maria’s favorite television show was *La Rosa de Guadalupe* connected her popular cultural world with her spiritual one, intersecting with her gender and heritage cultures as well. Finally, because the story of *La Virgin de Guadalupe* was about the significance of the mother of Jesus and not Jesus Himself, there was also a more feminist perspective in this spiritual narrative.

Childhood and Womanhood Crossings

Coming of age.

Maria’s gender identity also intersected with her developmental age. As a fourteen year old young Mexican American woman, she could be classified as an early adolescent, a developmental period characterized by tremendous cultural and social identity formation (Harklau, 2007; Maldonado, 2001; Vadenboncouer & Stevens, 2005). Thus her developmental age also intersected with her other identities, compounding their manifestation. Literacy for these youths has played an important role in helping form and express this developing identity and impacted the way they learn. In fact, Alvermann (2002) claimed that:

Adolescents’ evolving expertise in navigating routine school literacy tasks suggests the need to involve them in higher-level thinking about what they read and write than what is currently possible within a transmission model of teaching, with its emphasis on skill and drill, teacher-centered instruction, and passive learning (p.202).

This age involves a cognitive revolution and a developing sense of the world. More specifically as a fourteen year old eighth grader, Maria fell into the category of an early adolescent, which “draws upon progressivist and romanticized understandings of this age/stage in life as one of turbulence, change, and transition” (Stevens, 2005, p.63).

Before the start of middle school, Maria's biggest worry was whether she would be bullied, an anxiety which becomes particularly salient for individuals around her developmental period (Hase et al., 2015). In middle school, in particular, such "aggressive behavior intended to harm another that is repeated over time and involves a power imbalance" begins to become especially acute (p.2). She expressed her feelings regarding bullying in both prose and poetry. In this piece composed on paper just before beginning middle school in the summer of 2014:

Nervous about Middle School

Am I going to get bullied? Am I going to be called the "teachers pet? Or am I not going to get along with students? Those are all the ~~nervous~~ questions that are eating me up like termites ~~that are~~ going after a block of wood. Is middle school like the ~~horrible~~ worst thing in your life as people say? Or the sweetest place? Well, those are all my questions toward middle school? (August 10, 2014)

I identified themes of School and Developmental Age in this sample. Perhaps in a self-fulfilling prophecy in her writing by branding middle school as "the worst thing in your life," she did experience bullying as she began middle school. When I met with her the first few months of school, she often divulged that she was being teased and ridiculed for being "a teacher's pet." But through time, she decided to resist such treatment, and stand up for herself, as shown through this poem composed at the end of sixth grade:

Bully

The word that

Echos in your mind

Bully

You are desperate for a friend

A true friend

Bully

You ruined your life

Your Reputation

Bully

Never caring

When others get hurt

Bully

Do you have a Conscience?

Bully (April 3, 2015)

Here, Maria's perspective had shifted from that of a victim of bullying to now someone who was questioning the bully, almost to reverse the role of aggressor. She stated that the bully had lost his reputation and friends, and asked whether he even had a conscience. Here, I could see she was developing increasing confidence in herself, even just through the course of a school-year.

Parentified childhood.

Indeed, "adolescence, like mid-life, may be [more accurately] described as a period of transition, bridging one developmental period and the next one, rather than a period of crisis" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.241). Through her interviews and composition, Maria certainly displayed this in-between quality, where she engaged with age-appropriate artifacts, such as coming-of-age narratives and adolescent texts, while assuming adult roles as well. In fact middle school did affect her, as Maria even declared to me in an interview conducted just as she began middle school:

This year's changed me a lot. I mean, I'm not like how I was last year. I mean, I'm getting more mature now than I was before. I'm starting to do my chores more often. Middle school's changed me a lot because now I'm not like, "I'm gonna do this later." I'm gonna do it now. And, it all has been changing for me

‘cause it helps me speak more louder when I’m translating for my parents. So, middle school is really, really good. (Interview, October 20, 2014)

She often fretted about her family’s finances, how her sisters were doing in school, and whether her three-year-old brother had eaten today. She also had to worry about her biological father abducting her and her sisters back to Mexico, and whether President Trump would deport her parents, and how she and her next oldest sister would survive alone here. Her most common response to my inquiry of how she was feeling was unquestionably, “Worried.”

Also by stating that she spoke “more louder” in translating for her parents, she was not only describing the volume of her utterances, but rather the manner and confidence in which she communicated. Her demeanor had become steadier, and she would maintain sustained eye contact with whomever she was speaking. The volume of her speech had also been elevated, as she appeared more confident in what she needed to express. I did often see her as what Orellana (2009) referred to as a “parentified child” (p.10), where the allocation “of parental power to a child is a natural arrangement of large families, in single-parent families, or in families where both parents work” (p.10). I often noticed her at the sink scrubbing potatoes, or changing her baby brother, or even reprimanding her siblings when they were misbehaving. This role of parentified child was not solely contingent on her gender, however, because in another Mexican American family I studied, the oldest child, a boy, also functioned as a surrogate parent as the oldest English-speaking child, even offering to sign permission slips in his father’s stead for his younger sister.

Experiences of popular culture.

When I first began studying Maria in the fifth grade, she was still very much into Disney characters, especially the Little Mermaid, Ariel. She used to write her own stories of mermaids, such as this composed on March 1, 2014:

Splash! Have you ever meet a mermaid? Well I have. Come in and dive into my world. Come on let's go, dive in!

One day I was swimming in the ocean when I saw a dolphin. It did a weird movement and it signaled to me to it. Then it excitedly yelled, "Grab on child. We are going for a ride to the Underwater City of Atlantis"! Swoosh! Down we went to the bottom of the ocean, and there it was, Atlantis. It was beautiful. Then I got off the dolphin and delicious said "Thank you for the ride!" Then I went exploring in that magnificent place. Then a mermaid swam to me. She was a blond haired mermaid. Then she said to me "I am Echo, nice to meet you". Then I replied "Nice to meet you too, Echo. She have an invitation and said, "Bye".

I went to a hotel and slept there. The next day I read the invitation and went where the party was going to be at. Then I found Echo and gave her my delicio and she said, "Thank you." Next Echo gave us a searching list. We went looking for animals and other things. So everyone found the things but, they didn't find the sharks. Echo lead us to a cave, a gloomy, dark, and cold cave. There was sharks.

The angry sharks chased us out of the cave. Then I discovered I could talk shark language mmm...that's strange. While I had that power I took advantage of it. So I made a deal with them. They agreed. They were complaining about how we woke them up from I sleep. I aplozied for that. The deal was that we would

have to give them lots of sweets. Then the mermaids honored me for saving them from the sharks. They were relivied because those sharks threatd the city.

Finally, Echo gave out lots of candy and sweets. Every kind. Yum, yum, yum.

Then I said “Thank you”. Then I rode a whale back up to the surface.

Her narration was full of action, with magical people and other sea creatures. The world inside her was full of magic and enchantment. There was an air of optimism, a palpable enthusiasm in her writer’s voice, as Maria constructed this underwater world for the reader. Also, she hated to write in black font only, and would always color her font to make her writing more vibrant. She chose the color blue to symbolize the ocean, to demarcate the portion of her narrative that was underwater. Each decision she made in her writing, whether it were planning the plot, constructing the dialogue, or even the color or style of the font, was purposeful and meaningful.

In Ariel, she found a girl in between worlds. She wrote in August of 2014 this story about meeting the mermaid:

”A Sudden Change”

Splash! Wow! did I just see a mermaid tail, ~~splash~~ in the water. Well, ~~does are~~ there is only one way to find out. So I dived in the ocean and swimed to where the mermaid was and I was right! It is a mermaid. Not only a mermaid but it is Airel the mermaid princess. Cool. So I followed her, and I catched up to her. Airel said “Nice to meet you.” I replied “Nice to meet you too.” Airel said “Hey, I like your tail”. What?! Yeah, oh, I have to leave bye! Airel said. Oh, well Airel left. Now I had time to figure out, how I grew a tail.

In this narrative, Maria interacted with Ariel underwater. The two had a casual conversation, perhaps a touch of magical realism, where the magical was made to seem commonplace.

As is evident with the above piece, popular culture was a significant aspect of her life. Her gender and age may also have impacted her engagements with the type of popular culture (Driscoll, 2002). In the spring of 2014, when Maria was in the fifth grade, she was passionate about Disney, from *The Little Mermaid* to the newly released movie *Frozen*. In fact, popular culture had always been an embedded aspect of her literacy, as she would even construct fan-fiction of Disney stories for her two sisters to read. In her living room were always books and DVD covers of Disney movies. She particularly loved stories about a girl and her sisters or family, so the movie *Frozen* and *The Hunger Games* book series were particularly appealing.

After a conversation between the two of us about what meaning mermaids had for her, being half human and half fish, she termed the identity as “human-fish,” a hybrid between the two species. In addition, she had even come to identify herself and her own cultural or national hybridity in such terms. In this poem, she described her state:

I feel as if ,
I just went through a whirlpool.
I think,
I just found out who I am.
I am really not a human,
Instead I am a mermaid,
a creature that lives in the ocean,
and gets captured for being a human-fish.
Like me.
This will change my life forever.
Well, I better start getting use to it,
I feel as if ,
I am a criminal that,
is hiding from the police.
I think,

I just fell through a whirlpool. (August 29, 2014)

Again, the theme of humanity that coursed through her many of her texts was evident. In this piece she identified as a mermaid, as someone not quite human. She lived in a bordered reality, between two cultures that felt mutually exclusive for her.

Maria also often searched for popular songs on YouTube or iTunes. She preferred a mixture of heritage and majority culture artists. For example, when I first asked her favorite pop singers, she responded immediately, “Prince Royce, Enrique Iglesias, Paulina Arojo,” all Latin pop artists who often sang in Spanish, but also sometimes crossed over to English songs. Maria confessed that she did not like the Ranchera music her stepfather listened to. She described it as “music about people that are drunk, music that I don’t understand” (Interview, July 16, 2014). Her inability to comprehend these songs could be due to both language and cultural issues, from her lack of appropriate lexicon as well as background knowledge regarding life on the ranch in Mexico. Maria’s own music preference actually vacillated between Spanish-speaking songs and English ones.

For example, I can remember when she was younger, hearing her and her sisters sing *Let it go* from the Disney movie *Frozen*, or shout, “What does the fox say?” a line from a popular song at the time by the Norwegian comedy group, Ylvis, on the playground. Another time, when I took her and her sisters to the ice cream shop, I can remember the four of us loudly singing to Taylor Swift when *Blank Space* began playing in the restaurant. The first present I bought her was a writer’s notebook with Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, her favorite Disney story, on the cover. When I handed it to her, she quickly held it to her chest, and said, “I’m not going to write in this now. I’m saving it for when I write something special,” and proceeded to hide it under her

mattress. That was also precisely the place her two sisters knew Maria hid her writing, so they always dug under her mattress whenever they wanted to read her stories.

But, as she has matured, her Mexican self became more evident. She gravitated towards Spanish-speaking television drama programs like *La Rosa de Guadalupe* (Herros, 2008 –), a Mexican series about a person who got into trouble, and then found help through praying to the Virgin of Guadalupe. At this time, a white rose would appear before the altar or a statue of the Virgin, and would remain there throughout the development of the conflict. Each episode stood alone as a completed narrative. The protagonists of these stories all underwent some hardship, like physical abuse or substance addiction. The rose acted as symbol of this conflict, and disappeared with its resolution.

She liked the show for its familiar and predictable plotline. In fact, when she was younger, she always gravitated towards Disney princess movies, wherein the heroine encountered a villain, perhaps an evil stepmother, and was rescued or found strength in herself. She relished in the movement of the narrative. She also liked stories with protagonists who come from humble backgrounds, and must strive above their conditions, like Katniss from *The Hunger Games* and Maleeka from *The Skin I'm In*. As she matured, she gravitated towards more realistic narratives.

Synthesis

As she moved through, and between, girlhood and womanhood, Maria's age, gender, class, and ethnicity together shaped her social and familial role. As a child, she had to take on the mentality of an adult, to be wary of outsiders, to not act impulsively and think through decisions before acting on them. Her parents in part depended on her for their knowledge of the majority culture, of the realities they faced in the "outside" world, and how to navigate that context. She had to think for younger siblings, and draw boundaries for their safety. She spoke English with

adults on the phone, and was a part of parental discussions about major family decisions to which her siblings were oblivious, like whether they would need to move from their home in the U.S. due to political uncertainties.

For example, on November 16, 2016, she relayed to me her parents' sentiments after Trump's election: "We're still like kinda scared. We don't know what's gonna happen after January, when Trump comes in. We're still gonna wait and see what happens. We're not going to be like, 'OK, we're leaving already.' We have to wait and see what happens first." "We" in this case was she and her parents. They met to discuss their plans after the new president's inauguration. As the oldest child, she often sat in on adult discussions, and so that was the reason she often treated her younger siblings in a parental style. Her parents depended on her as another able adult, as a competent woman, even when society saw her as a child.

Discussion

In Maria's world, components of her ethnicity, her culture, influenced and affected other identities, from her gender, her socioeconomic class, and her family's documentation status, to her spirituality, her developmental age, her love of media literacy and popular culture and her geographical culture. These dimensions of self all intersected in her literacy engagements. With such compounding factors, as a whole, many Latinx individuals like Maria continue to lag behind other ethnic groups in terms of education attainment. Intersecting factors for Latinxs, such as nation of origin, immigration status, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and language fluency engage in dialogue with each other to form "interlocking systems of power and oppression" (Núñez, 2014, p.34).

For example, for Maria, her English language fluency represented an asset and form of power for her, as she translated for monolingual Spanish-speakers and monolingual English-

speakers in her life. Sometimes, she even translanguage between Spanish and English in her writing, and manifested dual linguistic awareness and consciousness. Translanguaging is about “going both *between* different linguistic structures, systems and modalities, and going *beyond* them” (García & Wei, 2014, p.24, emphasis in original). Her bilingualism even had granted her a privileged status in the U.S. in being able to understand and communicate with both English and Spanish. This ability also gave her understanding of the nuances of both languages and cultures so she could go beyond one sided meanings of words to understand the cultural tinges of language. In writing bilingual pieces, Maria activated her two cultural consciousness, showcasing cultural affiliation with language choice. Such bilingual and bicultural awareness nurtured understanding and empathy for people different from her.

Her home neighborhood in the southeastern U.S. was rife with drugs and crime, with gang insignia sprawled on street signs in black Sharpie. Although most residents in the neighborhood were Mexican, they also hailed from a particular geographical location, Michoacán, known for its high crime and drug trafficking (Guerrero, 2013). In their odysseys to the U.S., many Mexicans from this region made the harrowing journey north bound for the Texas border with the aid of coyotes, or smugglers of migrants. In this U.S. space, Mexico and the U.S. encountered each other daily, from Mexican soap operas playing in many houses to the local vendor who sold spicy Mexican tamarind candy and savory Taki snacks out of her living room. Teenagers drove by, but instead of blasting hip hop or country music, they played Chavela Vargas and Javier Solís, popular Ranchera musicians, loudly in their second-hand cars, rising and falling in hydraulic rhythm. The space of the neighborhood harbored Mexican culture and the Spanish language at every corner, in almost every house, and in many yards. The Southern landscape was given a Mexican flavor. As Maria traversed the terrain, both in and outside her

neighborhood, she brought with her heritage cultural memories and perspectives that influenced her experience of these locations.

Inside the home, there was a closeness and tenderness between the children in the family. First, the three girls shared one bed, and although they each had a separate circle of friends, they had a visible bond among them. I can recall once when I took them to Burger King, the three girls ordered one bacon cheeseburger and a whopper. I wondered how the girls would split two sandwiches among the three of them, but then I saw them sitting in a row, and proceed to pass each sandwich from one to another after taking a bite. Her family's social class made her acutely aware of the necessity to be frugal and not waste anything. Her family's economic status also drove many decisions, from her mother helping her grandfather in the field, to her escaping across the border, to where the family would live in the U.S. In her literacy, Maria was acutely aware of her family's economic condition, which impacted her motivation to obtain a scholarship, go to college, and attain a profitable profession. In her eyes, socioeconomic status was also tied to race, as she did not see many White or Asian residents in her lower-income neighborhood.

I could understand how she was able to identify with an African slave in her writing and with Maleeka, the black protagonist of *The Skin I'm In*, as most of her neighborhood's non-Latinx residents were African Americans. In her interactions with them, and through learning about African American history in school, she had come to identify with aspects of their experience, which combined with her own in a "colored" reality for her. Simultaneously, however, she also felt resentment towards Black people because they did not have to deal with issues of immigration status and deportations. In fact, in one interview in which we talked about President Obama's immigration policies, Maria said,

I feel that I'm kind of mad at the president because he won't let [Mexicans] cross. They're also human beings. And, I know it's also hard for him, because sometimes he does want people to come, but it's really hard because I think he's been through the process of being treated very badly just because he was African American. And, I think one part of me thinks he's trying to get the anger out, but the other part he actually feels really sad for those people for trying to come here for a better life or something. (Interview, October 2, 2014)

In this exchange, Maria expressed her empathy for how difficult the situation was for President Obama, but later also suggested his immigration policies might have been due to the bitterness he felt for his ancestors in this country.

She went on to say when I asked why she thought President Obama opposed immigration, "No, I mean there are no reasons, but part of me just thinks he wants to get all the anger out from his ancestors being treated really badly." Because Maria learned about slavery in the U.S., she assumed that Obama's actions were a result from bitterness over the mistreatment of his ancestors, even though I reminded her that his ancestors were not slaves. It was apparent Maria understood her world from a historical lens, giving credence to the present. But, in this interchange, I saw parts of her attitudes on race and culture; wherein she had previously tied economic realities to race, here she had also tied historical context to racial identity and as foundation for current racial attitudes. This historical view deepened her understanding of the racial reality, as she grew to understand the influence of past events on present attitudes.

In her literacy efforts, especially in her more critical pieces regarding her culture, or about African Americans and other minorities, she championed equality and agency for minorities. At the same time, she held complex views about other minorities, simultaneously

envying others for not needing to worry about the separation of family and deportation, while also sympathizing with their past sufferings. For her, however, her people were suffering currently, enduring physical and emotional hardships both on their trek over to the U.S. and in their mischaracterization by society in their present lives.

Having officially just entered her teenage years, Maria had an excuse to display the typical signs of rebelliousness and contention. Yet, due to awareness of her family's economic lack and documentation issues, she mostly steered away from such behaviors, focusing rather on her schoolwork and the maintenance of the home, preparing meals and cleaning around the house. Here, her family's difficulties superseded her own whims, and she needed to act more as a calculating adult to compensate for what her family lacked. Often times, she was on the phone with the Food Bank, inquiring about produce and groceries available, or calling the doctor when her brother was sick. She at times did function as another parent. Children of Mexican families are often expected to sacrifice for their families (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). But, because her mother had to give up her own educational and professional dreams for the sake of her family, she did not want the same fate for her daughter. Maria went to school every day, and her mother made sure she finished her homework before venturing out into the neighborhood space. Each week, when I visited their home, her mother also expected me to help her with her math work or review for an exam.

Also, her gender and developmental age played a role in her sense of self in her present context, and in her attitudes about her culture (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015). As an early adolescent, parentified child, Maria was also a young woman who lived in a patriarchal context. Her Mexican heritage conjured traditional notions of gender roles and statuses. Even her mother's arduous border crossing could be viewed as maternal sacrifice for the family. She

endured unspeakable sufferings on her journey, from a deficit of food and sleep, the lack of shelter in the frigid desert night, to running on her blood blisters through thorny thrush and gravelly desert, to finally swimming through the icy, unforgiving waves of the Rio Grande. Back on land, she had to outrun the border guards and their pack of dogs. The physical hardships and sacrifices appeared more like masculine roles, but because her goal was to provide for a better life for her unborn daughter, her mother still conformed to the traditional Mexican female roles in sacrificing for the family. In the photograph on top of the television was Maria's mother, ten years younger, clutching a young Maria, holding her so close that her daughter's fleshy cheeks appeared like creasing dough. Her mother had given so much for her family, to allow her children an opportunity to dream, and to live out those dreams. However, her present life also counteracted these traditional gender roles, as she saw her stepfather sacrifice sweat and sleep for the sake of his family as well.

This shared family narrative had been internalized by the children, and so Maria sensed the precariousness of her family's existence in this geographical space. Embedded in this chronicle was also her ethnicity and culture, her sense of being Latinx and Mexican. Yet, tied to her mother's story was also her sense of gender, of how strong and determined women could be. Instead of internalizing the sacrificial aspects of womanhood, I found that Maria had rather picked up on the resiliency and agency of women from her mother, who had taken the initiative to cross into the U.S. without documentation. Her mother strove to assist Maria in any way she could with her schooling, from procuring additional books from the neighborhood clubhouse to asking me and other teachers for assistance on homework. I could see her mother striving to provide what she could not attain: a solid education; she instead had to learn about the world

from experience. One of the reasons she allowed me to constantly intrude on their family was the promise of my tutoring Maria.

Identity Intersections

Maria's life was rife with convergences between her different perspectives. Her positionalities overlapped at times, such as when her Mexican heritage affected her gender and familial attitudes (Núñez, 2014). In essence, she had "various systems of domination and oppression, sometimes independently and sometimes simultaneously, across different societal contexts" (p.42). Her *I*-positions were varied and complex, assuming different social statuses and positions of power in different circumstances. Because Maria watched *La Rosa de Guadalupe* and listened to Spanish music, coupled with U.S. shows like Judge Judy and the music of Taylor Swift and Katy Perry, her cultural and linguistic consciousnesses and perspectives were multiple. Although English was her dominant language and the southeastern U.S. her larger cultural context, aspects of Spanish and her heritage culture still intersected with these dominant aspects routinely. Even in her writing, one could see literally how two languages composed her world.

Maria's culture, gender, and class spoke to her sense of pride (Núñez, 2014). Her geographical region, spirituality, and popular cultures also added to her unique identity. Her developmental age of early adolescence conjoined with these other intersecting domains of self, creating a unique hybridity particular to Maria's own life circumstances. She was a Mexican American, first-born early adolescent girl from a lower-socioeconomic, undocumented family living in the rural southeastern United States and practiced Mexican Catholic and U.S. adolescent cultural traditions. These intersections of the various identities had overlapping layers of agency and oppression, aspects that made her resilient and proactive, while others, or even those same characteristics in other contexts, deprived her of that agency. For example, her ability

to speak and write both Spanish and English was a key characteristic of her Mexican American identity and had functioned as a source of pride in her creation of unique bilingual pieces that captured her dual frames of reference, which influenced the tone of her composition. Her Spanish-speaking self was given voice in her bilingual writing, inspiring a different tone from the English. Yet being Mexican American could have also simultaneously deprived her of a feeling of citizenship and legitimacy in the U.S. in feeling like an unsanctioned outsider.

In part through her literate activities, there was the intersection of her various, sometimes conflictual bordered identities. Her U.S. side negotiated with her Mexican identity; her child self mingled with her adult self; her gender attitudes affirmed a strong woman while also giving into chauvinistic forces; she grappled with her socioeconomic lack while dreaming of a future where she could provide for her family; finally, her engagement with the Catholic religion was intersected with elements of indigenous Mexican worship. All these negotiations were done within a heritage cultural context that transacted and dialogued with the majority culture, in a space that was apart yet also immersed. They lived among other minority cultures, the children attended dominant culture schools, and there was also the presence of outside people tied to the university and the community. Those factors brought not only the English language, but also dominant culture artifacts and U.S. political policies.

At these intersections, dialogue took place between her various, sometimes conflicting identities (Bakhtin, 1981; Hermans, 2001; Núñez, 2014). But, it was only the structured workings of researchers and scholars who distilled her identities into such categories, as an early adolescent parentified bilingual Mexican American girl from a lower-socioeconomic undocumented Catholic family who enjoyed both U.S. and Mexican popular culture. In studying Maria, I did not see such clear parsing of paradoxical identities, but a dialogue of different

positions that affected and influenced each other, engaged in mutual negotiation at the border. Her Mexican culture affected her gender and developmental age identities, so that her gender and age realities could not be conceived of in traditional U.S. frames of understanding. Her ideas of class were tied to her concepts of race, which were connected to her understandings of geographical place, not only between Mexico and the U.S., but also between her neighborhood and more affluent spaces on the outside as well. Her family's documentation status, her gender, her class, her age, and her culture formed these "interlocking systems of oppression and dynamics within those systems that constrain[ed] life chances" (Núñez, 2014, p.37).

Some could view her disparate positionalities as mutually exclusive and distinct, that being both Mexican and American, both child and parent, was not possible. Furthermore, her notions of her family's culture and class functioned both as a source of pride and of impetus to rise to her dreams. In Maria, I saw not only the possibility of such combination, but the strength and power from such a conjunction of identities. She had the power to view the world from multiple perspectives, from multiple angles, so that her sight, her attitude about the world, was a living hybrid of a multilingual reality unencumbered by presumptions of how she should act.

Power of the Intersections

I see at the intersection of these multiple borders between her various identities turmoil, but also power (Núñez, 2014). She not only gained empathy and compassion for disparate realities, but also engendered a form of strength, for where one cultural context had depressed attitudes about an aspect of her identity, she could make up for with another's empowering conception. For instance, where Mexican culture typically did not give equal power to women, she could access her U.S. notions of gender equality as well as her mother's encouragement and inspiration to give her strength. Where the U.S. culture did not typically give children the power

to speak for their parents, her heritage home realities necessitated such a role. Thus, she had the ability to access power from whichever cultural context.

Whereas often the two cultural notions mismatched, such as popular culture or developmental norms, when such notions coincided, Maria's views were given greater intensity. For example, both the U.S. culture and her heritage family culture valued education in order to attain financial success. In Maria's life, she prioritized school and dreamed of a lucrative job. To her, a solid education was particularly desired. In such a way, Maria had the privilege to choose and assume the more empowering notion of a facet of her identity, contingent on the cultural schema. This dynamic gave her the flexibility and adaptability to be empowered in multiple contexts in her life. However, when a facet of her identity, such as her socioeconomic class, was strength in neither culture, she sought to rise above this identity. With all of the intersections of her various identities, she could also make up for problems experienced with class with other identities, such as her family and spirituality. Thus intersectionality not only heralded a complex network of identities, but also portended the compensation and mutual benefitting of identities. These alternating strengths and limitations formed overlapping layers of fortitude and weaknesses for her.

Conclusion

Every time I left Maria's neighborhood, I drove by the clusters of trees in fields of clay and red dust. The sands swirled around my car, and my engine would cough and choke before starting finally. She sometimes sat on a little wooden chair besides her doorway, and in her yard, second-hand playground sets casted multicolored shade on her. Her face had a half-hearted smile, her eyes saying goodbye, as she waved.

I saw the many dimensions within her, the complex spaces occupied by one young individual still negotiating with reality. The intersectionality of so many different, sometimes exacerbating traits, amplified the obstacles around her. Yet, I saw them as not as multiple confounding factors, but also a mix of strengths and constraints. Where one area might have been lacking due to her inaccessibility to outside formal tutoring, she picked up with other factors, such as her biliteracy, so that she could enact composition with two languages, describing the world in diverse hues.

In the intersection of her multiple identities, I saw some strengthened by others, such as her gender identity being strengthened by her heritage culture folktales. So, in essence each factor dialogued with another, forming overlapping interstices and interactions. Her multiple selves distilled to one being, identities that directed her body to act, to write, to live.

As she waved at me, I waved back. Somehow, all those dimensions that I have studied and parsed, isolated to study, combined into one. All I saw was Maria.

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Appendix 1

Table 5.1: Writing Data Collection

	Venue	Type & Amount
Email	School	3 poems (1 page) 1 essay (2 pages)
Drive	School	45 prompts and reading responses (39 pages) 34 pages of Brain Cranks 6 pieces of poetry (2 pages)
Hard-Copy	Summer Writing Camp	24 fictional narratives 10 personal narratives 5 essays 2 poems (31 pages)
Assigned Writing	My Study	1 essay (2 pages) 1 poem (1 page)

Appendix 2

Table 5.2: Coding Chart for Intersectionality

Narrative Coding of Interviews, Observations, and Writing (Primary Coding) with ATLAS.ti

Culture/Race	Gender	Family	Friends	Class	Age	Language	Reading	Writing	Pop culture
Geography	Border Crossing	Stress	Politics						



	Dom Cult	Age	Gender	Class	Region	Pop Culture	Spirituality	Other Cultures
Heritage Culture	Border crossing	Parentified Child	Can't play soccer, sacrifice 4 fam	Farming class	Michoacán: drugs & gangs	Rosa de Guadalupe, La Llorona	Virgin de Guadalupe, Juan Diego	Looks down on other minority cultures
Age	Minor	X	Girls tend to siblings	children exp of class	X	Kids like Disney	X	X

Gender	Girls are equal with boys	Girls prepare to be wives and mothers	X	"Only certain jobs a girl can do"	X	<i>Hunger Games, The Little Mermaid, Frozen</i>	Women painted as altruistic	X
Class	Lower SES	X	Girls can be anything they want	X	US South less industrializing	X	X	Class dependent on race/ethnicity
Region	Rural SE	X	X	X	X	X	Mexican Catholicism	X
Pop Culture	Disney, Judge Judy, Taylor Swift	Kids engaged in adult traditions	<i>La Rosa de Guadalupe</i>	Enjoys texts with lower class heroines	X	X	X	Anime, Mexican soap operas
Spirituality	Catholic Traditions	X	Woman sacrifice for family	X	Baptist traditions	X	X	X
Other Cultures	History of subjugation/inequality	X	X	Whites=upper; Colored=lower	X	Disney, Anime	X	X

Sample Intersectionality Analysis for Interview Data (Secondary Coding)



Major Categorical Codes of all Data Types (Tertiary Coding)

Culture, Class Gender	Border Crossings	Girlhood and Womanhood
culture, class, gender intersections	culture, developmental age, language intersections	gender, developmental age, pop culture negotiations

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

IMPLICATIONS: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS

In this dissertation, I describe the cultural development of an early adolescent Mexican American girl from a lower-class undocumented family in conjunction with her literacy engagements, and comment on the intersectionality and dialogic nature of her multiple identities (Núñez, 2014). Her family and personal lives intersected with her academic and social lives, interacting distinct and hybrid positionalities or selves in these various contexts. I found a complex cultural identity, influenced by the dominant majority culture as well as her family's heritage narratives and traditions. Her cultural identity was hybridized, as manifested by her beliefs, activities, and composition, which in her case, was also mixed culturally and linguistically. I found a dialogue of positions that influenced her literacy engagements, particularly her written composition. I found her created text to be in between languages and cultures, showcasing distinct elements of contrast and assimilation. It was in these bilingual texts, that I saw an early adolescent's identity that was unique and developing, which carried not only heritage and dominant culture artifacts, but also a different sense of the world (García & Wei, 2014). In the entanglement of her various identities, I saw complexities that troubled my preconceptions about her identity and its expressions, and the effects of that expression on her self-worth. In the multilayered, overlapping and fluid cultures in her identity, she found strength and resiliency.

Via Maria's composed heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981), multilingual text, as well as her speech and behaviors, I found intersecting domains of existence. These positions were dialogic

in nature, as they coexisted and mutually influenced each other. Wherein some of these different facets of her identity were beneficial to her existence, others were more detrimental to her sense of self-worth and belonging. However, she often chose the cultural definition with the more empowering notion of a particular identity, not only giving her added leverage beyond solely dual linguistic acumen, but a level of power associated with multiple cultural notions of her world. Her multilingualism and multiculturalism both functioned as an asset to her existence and empowered her in her world. Not only was she writing and speaking as a Spanish-speaking Mexican girl, she was also writing and speaking as an English-speaking U.S. self, cultural and linguistic elements that came together. These two languages and cultures were separate at first in her earlier pieces, but as she developed more cultural awareness and linguistic acumen, she often wove both into a single piece. Her multiple other identities, such as her sense of gender and social class, also manifested, her complexities coexisting on the page.

In the bigger picture, it is often these “variations within and between multiple social identities [that] present critical considerations in the understanding of Latin[x] college access and success” (Núñez, 2014, p.57). In our Language Arts classrooms in this globalized era, to better honor the idiosyncratic needs and abilities of our students, schools can be open to the translanguaging and heteroglossic works of our students (García & Gaddes, 2012; García & Wei, 2014). The texts that our minority students compose, the languages they use, the tones that they employ, hark back to a personal story, to ancestral narratives impacting the schema in their current lives. By encouraging such bilingual, bicultural writing, we also give them an opportunity to share their complex understandings of the world with the school community. When peers are introduced to such diverse voices, their own palette for understanding the world aggrandizes, made more complete with different thoughts, beliefs, languages, and stories.

Mexican American students often bring a wealth of heritage cultural and linguistic knowledge, personal and community narratives that consist of their psyche. Through writing, parts of that complexity can be expressed. As instructors, we may not fully comprehend each of the words created in their heritage language, nor be able to judge the grammaticality or conventionality, but what is more important in writing and literacy instruction, I believe, is for students themselves to connect personally with the act of literacy. Through using the languages they utilize at home, they connect their academic and home lives. Through being able to use two or more languages at once, they are able to traverse the different spheres of their existence, so that different understandings of the world can join and be united. They can share their personal notions with their school community and with the world.

In fact, in all writing, this is what authors strive to do, to convey their personal experiences with the wider world. But, I have learned, to truly understand the words of the author, hir intentions and depth of meaning, I need also to understand the life of the author, to know hir history, hir unique story. So, the world also needs to reach out to the author even as the author reaches out to the world in a dialogic transaction with language and consciousness (Bakhtin, 1981). From following, observing, and interacting with Maria and her family for three years, I have come to know the strength and resiliency of these individuals. Because I know their family history, of the physical and emotional sacrifices they have endured, to the anxieties they experience currently, both financially and legally, I understand more intimately Maria's writing and her writer's voice, the intentions and emotions of the writer. The more one understands the author's life, the more closely our transactions with hir words can approximate the author's intentions. I have learned to recognize Maria's unique voice and feel more fully the sentiments in her writing.

When she read to me the poem about her family's socioeconomic status, I understood her sentiments, not only because she wanted to rise up above her present conditions, but also because she described her family's economic shortcomings explicitly, and because I knew what they have gone through to arrive here to this point in their lives. From observing her family's everyday struggles, each of her words were more pertinent and meaningful for me. When we talked, she would always state they were middle class, but in her writing, she expressed that they were "poor economically." Perhaps, she was more authentic and genuine in her writing because there were no social consequences, no person sitting across from her, for whom social repercussions existed. Through composition, she "just wrote [her] thoughts out" and be with her self.

Academic learning, when it is connected with students' home lives, better bolsters "*social-emotional learning*" (Elias, 2006, p.5), which involves "aspects of education that have been referred to as character education, service learning, citizenship education, and emotional intelligence." Integrating what they learn at school with their lives at home can prolong the learning experience and deepen the level of understanding. With activities such as reading at home, children's language and literacy development is aided with parental and familial interaction (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). With such facets of students' multiple contexts conjoined, they can better engage with the multi-context integration of their learning.

By connecting the school experiences of Mexican American students with their own home realities, or by intersecting the two in bilingual, bicultural engagements with literacy, students' multiple positionalities are validated and present in their classrooms. Intersectionality, then, can also describe the encounter of disparate languages, each representing a particular sociocultural consciousness (Blommaert, 2015). Classmates share such realities with each other, and introduce unique ways of perceiving, naming, and sharing their worlds. Mainstream students

also get to know multiple realities apart from their own, and may engage in bilingual, bicultural engagements themselves. So, it is not only the cultural positioning and understanding of minority and immigrant students that are validated in such instruction, but mainstream dominant culture peers' educational experiences may also become more multivoiced. Their school experiences are less homogenized in one way of knowing, as they are introduced to the language and stories of diverse peers in different languages.

Language Arts curricula can be open to multilingual expressions and honor the cultural uniqueness of students. Other cultural traditions and practices can be valued as aspects of the eclecticism that makes the U.S. distinct in the world. Not only can minority students share their cultures and languages, but majority culture classmates also learn new perspectives and ways of naming the world. Honoring diverse stories and languages not only benefits our Mexican American and other ethnic minority students, but also those mainstream culture classmates by opening their eyes and ears to new perspectives and new voices.

Conversely, “a curriculum devoid of cultural relevance for minority students can help explain the common lack of engagement of Latin[x] youths in academic affairs” (García & Gaddes, 2012, p.114). When the curricula of our schools have no cultural pertinence to the lives of Latinx and other minority students, when the stories and languages are dissimilar from the ones they hear at home, these students may not be as invested in their learning. There are added stressors, compounding factors unique to the Latinx population that may further complicate their educational success (Núñez, 2014). Literacy education can be one means by which Latinx individuals, and Mexican American students in particular, can express their complex psyches nurtured by such particular intersectionality of compounding identities.

Maria's writing was real and made me, as an adult researcher of a different gender, race, and class, feel her emotions. As an early adolescent Mexican American girl from an undocumented family, she had much to show to her dominant mainstream learning community, to introduce another way of seeing the world. I saw her writing conform to the mainstream identity when she was younger, and transition to a more critical heritage writer identity as she developed. However, this shift was less a shift in cultural identification, but more with the development of a heritage voice. In learning to write in Spanish, she could express another cultural consciousness as well that was previously silent (Blommaert, 2015; Cuero, 2009). With this awareness of the fluidity of cultures and languages, our curricula and assessment standards can be more open and validating of the diverse resources our students bring to the classroom as they learn to engage with their world via multiple languages and media.

Maria expressed pride in her gender, yet was at times limited as well. Her girlhood was at once a source of pride and strength, a facet of herself to drive her to excel in an unequal world; yet her gender may also be a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure, a facet of herself that hampered her ability to reach for her highest aspirations. As a young girl in her classroom, I wonder about her ability to make her voice heard. As a girl in the larger U.S. society, I wonder if her gender will be a source of strength for her in the future. With narratives of strength and agency regarding women, Maria learned to honor her gender. As a Mexican American girl from a lower-class undocumented family living in a heritage community, her gender was both a liability and a facet nurturing resistance. Her gender compelled her to reach higher in her world to become a pioneer for her gender in her heritage context.

In all these intersections, I also found her cultural identity to be constructed via her engagements with literacy. Her literacy interactions facilitated expression and perhaps even

construction of these intersections. Maria may not have been explicitly aware of these factors on her identity, but in her compositions and transactions with texts, the intersections influenced the means with which she related to language, with the mutual construction of meaning between author and text (Bakhtin, 1981). Nurturing students' relationship with texts and purported meaning is one objective of literacy education.

I believe Language Arts classrooms can provide such students with a forum to voice their complexities, their emotions, so that the classroom and home are related, so students can bring home what they learn at school and see the connections. In this dialogic contextual relationship, what they compose at home, then, transfers more readily to the classroom as well. Writing need not be conceived as the five-paragraph essay format at school and the diary or narrative style at home, but both serve as equally valid forms of composition in either context. In such ways, when diverse styles of writing are encouraged, the imaginative and cultural understandings of students may come alive, and co-construct their learning and understanding.

Cultural Awareness

Students from immigrant families often need to learn the mainstream U.S. culture to succeed academically and socially. Schools can, in turn, also develop a consciousness about the cultural realities of these diverse students. For example, listening to Maria and her family's stories, I got to know a perspective that is often misunderstood in the U.S., that of one undocumented Mexican immigrant narrative. Getting to know Maria meant more than just spending time with her and her family, reading her writing, and speaking with her formally for an hour every few months. As I engaged in these activities, I also became more aware of her Mexican American culture. From her speaking of her parents' lives in Mexico, to her mother's border crossing experience, to their present struggles in their daily lives, I saw a more complete

picture of a Mexican family's transition to the U.S. In observations and conversations, I got a glimpse at her current lived realities as well in a sometimes hostile majority culture.

She relayed her repertoire of Mexican folklore and heritage cultural traditions, but also her engagements with the U.S. culture and its traditions. I saw the transience still occurring in her life, from heritage elements, like popular culture, food, music, language, and celebrations, to dominant culture products and activities, and back again. She transculturated as she translanguaged, bridging multiple cultural traditions and norms, and her identity was bordered among these distinct and hybridized cultural realities (Smith, 2003).

The fact that my study coincided with Trump's presidential campaign, in part, elicited a responsive and visceral assertion of her ethnic identity. I could hear the pain in her voice as she wrote about the plight of undocumented immigrants, when she emotionally relayed her mother's border crossing story and the distrust of the world as she spoke about the sector of the mainstream culture that vilified her family. As expressed via her writing and speech, she also felt for other cultures, and their histories of subordination and sufferings. Her transculturation was not a smooth one, as the movement was sometimes hampered by linguistic and political obstructions.

Yet, she also wanted the mainstream culture to be aware of her heritage culture, so that she could engender a cultural dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986). She used literacy to speak to her world, to engage her culture with a world that at times refused to listen to her. When I told her I read her poem, *When Will I Live a Better Life*, to a large audience at a conference, she was so delighted. She asked me how the audience responded. Every time, her middle school had a writing contest, she would enter a poem about the experiences of undocumented Mexican Americans. She wanted to share with the world her culture, about her and her family's lived reality.

The cultural stories that made up her notion of the world nurtured a diversity of norms. From the first language she spoke, to the ambiance of her home, to her engagements with neighbors and relatives, to her transactions with heritage legends, her Mexican self interacted with her school-based literacy and engagements. She used literacy as a means to connect these distinct elements, to make greater meaning from reading and writing in dual cultures and languages. These literate expressions also displayed Maria's multiple identities, aspects of herself that manifest as hybridized versions of her character, culturally, linguistically, and spiritually.

Yet, she was not only interacting with the dominant White and Mexican cultures, but other minority cultures with which she had come to know. Even with such awareness of others, her core was undeniably Mexican, which, as time went on, became more oppositional with the dominant culture which she had once adored. As she developed, her ideas of cultures, both others and her own, became more set, more crystallized as oppositional. Her literacy engagements grew more sophisticated, both in the texts she read and the writing she composed, and allowed her greater expressive potentials of these cultural beliefs.

As she engaged in her literate activities, she also traversed through cultural and linguistic categories. In reading texts, she learned to empathize with diverse people, people of different races, cultures, genders, and classes. In writing, she enacted her empathy to construct characters in an imagined world for the reader. In her writing, she intersected heritage stories with the dominant culture reality, intersecting reading and writing as she composed fan-fiction stories, and intersected her family's stories with her own. Literacy allowed her to nurture empathy with a wide arrange of realities, some familiar, some distant. Through reading and writing, she

developed a sense of cultural belonging, a cultural identity that was bordered between the U.S. and Mexican, as well as among others.

Power of Narratives

The cultural narratives of her family formed a major facet of her identity. Through these stories that she composed and spoke with me, I feel I gained a greater intimacy with them. Isabel welcomed me each week to join her family, and would on occasions offer me some of their food that she had prepared. On one day toward the end of my study, I told her how grateful I was to her for allowing me to intrude on their family for so long. Instead of saying, “You’re welcome,” she said in Spanish, “No, gracias a tí. Gracias por contar mi historia. [No thank you. Thank you for telling my story.]” Her words touched me, and her past inspired me. Each time I think my life is difficult, I remember her story and realize how fortunate I am. I feel as if this is the real power of narrative inquiry, to share often invisible stories with the world, to bring to light a genuine lived dimension of reality, a part of the world that you have been privileged to learn. I feel I have learned so much of their culture, and may have relayed some of my own, even as I initially endeavored to only study Maria’s personal culture and cultural awareness. I feel Maria and I exchanged both of our cultures, so that not only was I privy to her and her family’s culture, but they were also introduced to my own Chinese American self.

I have found through Maria’s stories, not only cultural schemas for knowing the world, but part of the lattice for her identity construction. Language undergirds understanding of our realities, and is the medium through which we share those stories. Through minority individuals’ narratives, both those they retell and those they imagine, layers of cultural meanings and understandings are presented. Narratives not only give meaning to individual’s lives, or add to the understanding of their audiences, but they also form the way we perceive reality, a “truth”

deemed by a shared consensus. Narratives not only record the story of humankind, but also construct it through the fickle nature of human memory, skewed by the constructive nature of our sharing and understanding of those stories which are influenced by other narratives we have heard.

In Maria's narratives, just as in her various identities, I saw distinctions and heteroglossia, but also elements of unitary truths. Just as Bakhtin (1981) spoke about centripetal and centrifugal forces in language, those that push inwards to a singular understanding, and those that expand definitions outwards to a plethora of meanings, I saw her identity engage in the same implosion and expansion through stories. Whereas her heritage stories passed down from generation after generation pulled her understanding of the world to a more unitary, singular notion, other stories she experienced pushed her understanding outwards, expanding to the bounds of heritage social conventions. Narratives in her life both pulled her to a core Mexican identity, while others also stretched her imagination and empathy to other cultural positions.

In narratives, participants' voices are prioritized, serving both the transmitter of data and the data itself. Through this intimate inquiry means, I gained much knowledge of my participant's life, and those of her family. I deeply felt for their struggles, and desired them to succeed. But, perhaps that is the part of me that wished to believe in the American Dream, in the American Narrative, that all immigrants, regardless of countries of origin, heritage language, cultural customs, race, ethnicity, political beliefs or religion are afforded the same opportunities in this country. These narratives also contributed to her cultural identity, to her understandings of gender, race, and class, so that her story was conveyed through multiple perspectives of reality.

The stories which our students bring to the classroom are integral parts of their identity and personal family histories. Being able to express and share such narratives give students a

sense of pride and empowerment, confidence to succeed in the mainstream dominant culture context. Perhaps through such dialogic interchange, they can feel more assimilated to the mainstream U.S. culture, while the U.S. culture also embellishes with the influence of these diverse voices. A cultural dialogue can exist in our classrooms and in the literacy activities of our students.

Through sharing these narratives, they not only educate their classmates regarding theirs or their families' past, but I believe they also come to know their own more intimately. I believe Maria understood more about her own culture and family as she spoke and wrote about her family and their collective pasts. She gained insight into her family's strengths and resiliencies, and shared them with the world. In the classroom context, when students can share such personal narratives with the class, and perhaps the world, they nurture empathy, compassion, and mutual understanding while appreciating more their own story.

As an integral aspect of narratives, the languages via which they are conveyed also are significant. When a story is told in their native tongue, that story's integrity is preserved, its idiosyncrasies preserved in their original vernacular. So, if I had been fluent in Spanish, perhaps my comprehension of the narratives of my participant and her family would have been deeper. Given the discrepancies caused by our linguistic impasse in traversing between Mexican Spanish and U.S. English, I fear I did not fully convey the depth of her meaning. But, in a way, being a cultural and linguistic outsider, my portrayal may have been a more authentic study of this Mexican American girl in the context of her lived reality unbiased by cultural identification.

Intersections

Understanding Latinx students' educational experiences is challenging, given "the variation among Latin[xs] in social categories including, but not limited to, (a) nation of origin,

(b) immigrant status, (c) class, (d) gender, (e) sexuality, (f) religion, and (g) language fluency” (Núñez, 2014, p.34). Each category is complex, its multiple dimensions and variability demonstrative of social power or liability. Maria’s social categories were even more variegated given her dual, sometimes shifting cultural positioning, giving her dimensions of being different definitions. As these positions engaged in dialogue with one another, their essence was altered, sometimes empowering and other times deflating. The complex interrelationship of all these intersections, coexisting together, forms an intricate system of overlapping categories of self.

Multicultural, multilingual minority girls may need to account for “matrices of oppression, or interlocking systems of oppression and domination that challenge educational equity” (Nuñez, 2014, p.47). The effects of their gender, when compounded with other factors, such as race and socioeconomic class, can nurture diverse identities. Like different chromosomes in DNA, there are limitless possibilities resulting from different combinations of factors. If any one such condition varies, the consequences are paramount. Maria’s identity, her individuality, is a result of the “interlocking systems” in her being.

As I viewed Maria’s life from an intersectionality framework, I came to see the distinct dimensions of her identity as compounding factors in her identity construction, facets that are often accessed and expressed in her understanding and creation of texts. This amalgam of identities, including cultural, gender, class, came together in her literate experiences. Meaning is authored in such intersections, points where they share. But, all of her identities are not common to any one interaction with literacy. The only common point in all of these identities is Maria, not only a name or a face, but in the complex multitudes of narratives and voices within her.

These intersections of language, of cultural norms, and of beliefs can happen in any classroom. The overlap is what education is about. When diverse consciousness can encounter

and synthesize, something greater is birthed. Maria's engagements with literacy, both in-school and out-of-school, author and express a self in between so many different categories. Her cultural identity and literate activities encountered and each enhanced the other. Her cultural identity influenced how she engaged in her literacy, and her literacy changed how she viewed her culture. Her conjunction of distinct positionalities, of the multitudes of perspectives of her world, further complicates and enhances expression of herself. I have gained a deeper appreciation for the power of literacy to display and construct who we are.

No matter who think we are, or the extent our students are, people are inevitably more complex. As soon as we endeavor to categorize or judge another, that characterization itself merits judgment. What conducting this study has taught me is to embrace the complexities in this world as an innate aspect of humanity, to learn to see resources where we may only see despair, to not pity others, but to honor their language and truth. In literacy classrooms, perhaps they can be given such a voice. In composition, an author engages in this intersection, by synthesizing his own voice with what he has learned, consisting of multiple different voices. So, writing encompasses this intersectionality, by manifesting the complex encounter of diverse perspectives and realities.

Her intersections not only conjoined different cultures and languages, but also validated the complexities in individuals. Her unique intersection constructed a particular person in a particular context. If any of the intersecting components had been different, if she were not the oldest child, or perhaps a boy, then, her story would have been substantially altered, even if all else remained constant. In the intersections of her identity, I not only teased out the distinct components of her being, to validate and honor their value, but also saw the power of their intersection, the effect of their conjunction.

When components of our identity, the various *I*-positions that make up our being, represent distinct markers for success and failures in society, when they represent different degrees of agency and potential, we become multivoiced. We feel certain ways in certain contexts, and in others, feel differently. We study, we learn, and transact with learning material based on these intersecting domains of self. The instructor or text speaks to us in ways due to our many identities, and the unique intersections of those identities. Our learning influences and is influenced by those intersections, the intersections unique to every individual.

Intersectionality allows for perceiving individuals as complex beings, and hinders researchers from all-or-none contentions about phenomena. This idea validates and showcases the conjunction of identities, making the individual more than just the sum of the disparate traits. Intersectionality is about the creation of a new identity with the distinct combinations of other fragments of identity. With this frame of thinking, participants become more complex, their characterization more complete. Her characteristics are no longer isolated, but contextualized and rationalized within the broader context of her existence.

I learned what I once believed to be a deficit could in fact be strength. If viewed through the filters of one's culture, elements of our identity can manifest different meanings. When other facets of Maria's identity came together, when different combinations were formed, different positions of power and agency developed. She donned different voices, conjured distinct tones in her literacy given the shift in her identity. Although I was aware of this effect, I do not believe she was cognizant of these dimensions. Intersectionality was not some academic, theoretical construct for her; this was her life. And, I was honored to come to know her.

Literacy Instruction

In my study, I found her multiple intersections also intersected with her literacy. Literacy transacted with all other intersections, and nurtured and expressed those complex identities. Through reading and composition, she assumed varying degrees of identity on a continuum of intersections. Her transactions with literacy gave her a vehicle to recognize and display the multiple dimensions of self. She could write in multiple languages, styles, and voices, assuming and manifesting different developmental ages as she matured. Her writing mirrored her cultural development, from assimilation into the U.S. culture when she was younger to integration of both cultures in her more recent compositions (Devos, 2006). Perhaps via literacy, those intersections were skewed through their expressions, and altered to cater to a particular audience or a particular context.

Engaging with Maria's literacy experiences for three years has also given me greater insight into how words and language transact with our cultural positioning and identification. Her choice in texts, both literary and media, changed from when she was younger to now. Maria's transactions with Disney books and movies when she was in elementary school constructed a world that sheltered her heritage self. Even though she professed to be Mexican, White princess stories grounded much of her sense of self and of the world. She saw the world as good and evil, a place with magical kingdoms partitioned from a calloused reality.

Through her literate activities, she also intersected the many components of her identity. She was in between languages and worlds, between ways of knowing and naming the world. As she read English texts, she also heard Mexican narratives told by her parents. She watched U.S. television shows coupled with Mexican programs, so that two worlds intersected with the

multiple other dimensions of her identity. These complexities then were transferred via language in a dialogic, two-way encounter between her internal self with her larger context.

Reading and writing are important facets of a student's interactions with knowledge. They are also important ways of communicating and sharing both lived and imagined realities. As Maria read texts about real lives and imaginary ones, I saw her bridging her own life and those of her creations in her own writing. In such ways, I see the power of literacy for young people, in introducing them to diverse realities different from their own, while also allowing them to create their personal truths.

Especially for individuals like Maria, who feel disempowered and partitioned from mainstream society, words can be that equalizer to give them equal footing with their context. She was able to express her dissatisfaction with political leaders or relay her sadness for the plight of undocumented migrants. Through sharing her writing, the world can function as her audience, even though she is only a fourteen year old Mexican American girl from a lower socioeconomic undocumented family. But, I see that because she is all those things, the world needs to listen to her writing. We need to hear her voice.

Language and language arts instruction, then, has a powerful part to play in nurturing an open, dialogic, democratic society. Curricula should look into more diverse texts and validate multilingual, multicultural composition. Students' school lives can relate to their home lives, and the diverse intersections of their existence can be bridged. Perhaps, we can learn to see them as authentic, valid individuals, and not partition their identities to separate dimensions to judge and categorize them for tailored instruction.

When students like Maria read texts about minorities and about girls, they are given greater validation to exist in this culture, as if their identities are affirmed by the U.S. society.

Their experiences as minoritized individuals, their unique sense of the world are reflected via printed texts. Somehow, their experiences become sanctioned and legitimized, even as their families may struggle with their legitimacies as residents in this country. Reading nurtures that intimate relationship with texts, with the voice of the author.

Through writing, such girl writers are given greater agency to express their passion. Like Maria, these authors can compose bilingual pieces that harken back to both of their linguistic and cultural frames. By using Spanish, the language of their childhood, of their home, of their heritage, they assert their most innate sense of the world. Through utilizing English, they enact the sanctioned language of power and conventionality, the language of teachers and classmates, of people on television and in markets. Their literacy engagements become multidimensional structures that form the foundation of their mental schemas for perceiving their world.

In our classrooms.

Understanding this complexity is important in our classrooms, because such awareness may assist in better reaching students. When students' multidimensionality is validated, their bordered identities are complicated to become more realistic and less stereotypical. The nuances in their being become meaningful facets contributing to their complex identity, their unique individuality. Especially in this era of standardization in education, validating the intersection of complexities in our students can better cater our instruction to their diverse needs.

By exposing students to diverse texts and compositions, our classrooms become less monoglossic and less prone to unitary language (Bakhtin, 1981). Multivoiced heteroglossic voices can complement these monotone curricula, and bolster the learnings of diverse learners in our schools. Mainstream classmates' notions of the world can also be embellished, and the whole learning community can engage in dialogic construction of knowledge.

Literacy curricula can be open to multicultural, multilingual texts that transcend the dominant U.S. perspective. Not only can published works by diverse authors be utilized in the schools, but the sharing of the writing of diverse classmates can also bring the issue of multiculturalism to the classroom and made more personal. By encouraging such diverse expressions, students are given the freedom to express themselves, to open their worlds to their community. Classrooms become more heteroglossic and multivoiced as a result (Bakhtin, 1981).

Student writing can reflect their lived realities, bilingual, codemeshing, and drawing from multiple heritage narratives. White American culture is also not monolithic and identical, with variations based on factors like socioeconomic class, religious beliefs, and European heritage. By valuing the diverse voices of our students, we also honor their unique pasts that form the basis for their current perceptions of the world. All students become individualized and unique. Their experiences and perceptions comprise the variegated dimensions of our classroom.

It may be impractical to expect teachers to get to know each of their students' narratives so intimately before instructing and assessing them. But, perhaps greater empathy and understanding can be encouraged when those stories influence their literacies, so we better understand their voice and the compounding factors influencing that voice. When we understand the writer, hir sentiments and intentions, we understand the true meanings of hir words. We better understand our students.

Conclusion and Future Studies

Through this study, I intended to share with the world Maria's cultural experiences and engagements with language. I thought I could uncover some hidden truth about literacy and its effect on cultural identity. I thought I could in turn teach Maria how to survive in the U.S. context as a minority. In reality, via this experience, I was humbled by her community, by the

beauty and love of a Mexican American family that opened its arms to me. I found myself struggling to repay that generosity. This is why Maria and her family's words touched me so much, that they are merely content and genuinely grateful with my sharing of their stories.

I have felt privileged to be able to share their world, to witness their resiliency and strength in midst so much antagonism. I imagined their struggle in their journeys into this country and witnessed their present everyday struggles. The fact that they remain here, facing so much backlash and heartache speaks to the immigrant spirit. Immigrants did build this country, and they still do, in the shadows of our nation, many without access to basic needs most of us take for granted. They struggle so their children, girls like Maria, can live a better life than they did.

In raising their young ones, these Mexican American parents also pass along their heritage narratives, oral stories that congeal with the narrative schemas simultaneously constructed by dominant culture texts. These young people then develop a notion of their world constructed in part from these stories. For me, it is in these stories that truth develops. As fictional and biographical texts combine, a dialogic synergy found in words develops. My own identity and subjectivities as a Chinese American who immigrated to the U.S. as a young boy, also transact with Maria's story. So, perhaps this paper is a dialogue of not only two cultures, the U.S. and Mexican, but also my Chinese heritage and literacy understandings.

It is impossible to partition and separate individuals' cultural positionings and contexts from their literacies. But, perhaps literacy instruction can be attuned to these variations and nurture greater agency for our students. Given the dialogic nature of cultural identification for these minority youths, and the conjunction of different components of self-identity, the complexities in their self-concept and their views of the world need to be validated in the

classroom. The different languages of their lives, the different stories that make up their worlds, the various intersections of identity, all synthesize in an individual and his notion of his realities.

There were aspects of this study which I could not cover due to limitations in time and resources. A future study could observe students like Maria in the Language Arts classroom, and observe their interactions with the material, as well as their instructor and peers. This may give the research greater connection to schools. There may also be similar future studies with several participants in a multiple case study to cover the variations among participants, with variables such as age, gender, class, and heritage nation. Statements about a certain participant could be couched in relations to specific facets, such as his age or gender, to account for variations in his identity. This would guard against biased or stereotypical characterizations of a segment of the population. Finally, there may also be longitudinal studies to describe the actual post-secondary, post-university realities for similar students. If I had the resources, I would have liked to follow Maria's path through college and beyond, to give a more complete picture of a young Latina's identity development and relationship with literacy.

My hope for this paper is to share Maria's voice, to explore what kinds of significance her spoken voice and writer's voice have in relations to her cultural and literacy experiences. Language, whether English or Spanish, oral or in print, spoken or written, heard or read, have the power to describe our worlds, the passions within us, to ignite inspiration and connect us with our past and futures. This day in age, we may all live fragmented, hybridized cultural and linguistic realities, and like Maria, our senses of identity fractured among multiple geographies and stories. Literacy instruction can engage in dialogue with that story, and help minority individuals connect with and express their lives. Even though I have highlighted all of Maria's assets, there is a part of me that fears she will end up as another dejected adolescent who has

given up on school or education. I have seen other young eager children with potential lose that vitality after high school.

Literacy education, when geared more towards the lived realities of our diverse students, can better impact and relate to their lives. With such connectivity, students not only interact their school and home realities, but also affect their education with the context. Learning is not limited to the classroom setting, and involves the disparate contexts of their lives. Through literacy, there may not only be intersection of students' various identities, but also the multiple dimensions of their lived reality. This dialogue of identities further aggrandizes the multiple fragments of identity (Hermans, 2001).

It is my hope for educators, parents, principals and all those who care about the education of our youths, that we can learn to listen to our students, and see them as complex individuals, and not merely a score or a category. Each student I have ever known, whether they were Black, White, Latinx, Asian, or Arab, regardless of gender, regardless of socioeconomic class, and of every nationality, I have seen the same inspiration sparked from stories. Meaning emerges from stories. Stories are how we, as humans, make sense of our lives, of the world we inhabit. As the multitudinous narratives that construct our globalized modern world dialogue with each other, and with our own, we construct a multilingual, eclectic reality, one in which we all belong.

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