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An Exploration of Identity Negotiation in Adult English Learners' Communities of Practice

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Acknowledgment

This has been a long process, and I would not have made it through without the help of some wonderful people. I want to thank Dr. Joan Rhodes who has been a thoughtful and patient advisor and chair over the past five plus years. I always came away from our conversations with so much clarity and a lot less stress. And I want to thank my amazing committee who helped shape the research and the design; I feel so fortunate to have had your expertise and guidance.

I also want to acknowledge my work colleagues, in particular Joanne, who has leant me so much support and encouragement. And a big thank you to Susan for all of the post structural conversations that helped me unload the swirling thoughts going around in my head and reassemble them in something that hopefully makes at least some bit of sense.

And, most importantly, I thank my awesome family. Thanks, mom, for always being proud and supportive. Thank you Evie for being born and making every day so much brighter. Thanks to Archie for the long walks. And thank you, Jeff, for everything – for reading through my drafts and listening to five years of stress and ideas and for just being you. I love you and would not have finished this without you.

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Abstract

AN EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS' COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

By Kathleen Daly Rolander, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018

Major Director: Dr. Joan Rhodes, Associate Professor, School of Education

In the United States, adult English language learners (ELLs) comprise an increasing percentage of the overall population with an estimated 26.7 million adult ELLs in the civilian workforce (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). Despite the growing number of adult ELLs and the evident need to aid their acclimation to educational and professional contexts, the current research in second language acquisition is largely remiss in its incorporation of the many contexts that impact adults' motivations to learn, their reasons for persistence, and the actual experiences that characterize their lives outside of the English-language classroom. This study utilizes Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice (COP) model to explore how ELLs navigate their positions within and between their many language learning communities. Drawing

on Norton's (1995, 2013) work on ELLs' identity negotiation and Wenger's 1998 work on the reinforcing impacts of identities between multiple COPs, this study explores what adults consider to be their COPs, how they perceive themselves within and between them, and how past, current, and imagined or possible COPs impact each other.

A constructivist, multiple case study design was used to focus on participants' perceptions of their identity negotiation processes through their own narratives across three interviews and weekly audio-recorded self-reports. Eight adult ELLs participated in the study, and their narratives revealed the temporal and situational nature of their connections to past, present, and future identities as English learners, as professionals, and as members of their communities. They experienced persistent explicit and subtle barriers to participation in their COPs with native English speakers, including a range of linguistic gatekeeping strategies. The study revealed several themes of COP membership, in particular an identification with a larger, less concrete, immigrant group that lead the participants to focus their narratives and English-learning efforts on their ability to advocate for themselves and for other immigrants in the United States. Recommendations from the ELLs and the researcher are presented for a more holistic approach to adult ELL instruction that incorporates more of the multiple facets of ELLs' learning trajectories in the target-language context.

Chapter 1: Introduction

English language learners (ELLs) constitute an increasingly substantial percentage of the U.S. population, but significant disparities in educational attainment and job earnings persist between them and their English-speaking peers (Wilson, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Attitudes and public perceptions regarding ELLs are often fueled by political agendas and widespread misinformation that alienate them from educational and professional opportunities to improve their qualities of life (Krogstad, 2015). As the ELL population continues to grow in communities across the country, educational policies and practices that impact ELLs should be better aligned to their actual needs in order to help them achieve their potentials as students, professionals, and community members.

The work presented here aims to emphasize opportunities for inclusion, resilience, and legitimacy for adult English learners who are operating within the structural paradigms of a foreign culture, through the vehicle of a new language, and in collaboration with members of their new English-speaking communities who demonstrate mixed and at times hostile reactions to their growing presence in both local and national landscapes. Rather than focus solely on the barriers that adult English learners experience as newcomers in this country, this work serves to present a gallery of moments and narratives that paint a broader picture of the opportunities that those who work with English learners may adapt and utilize to build policies, pedagogical

approaches, and inclusive educational programming to support and empower English learners in their interactions with native English speakers.

Researcher Stance

My initial investment in this topic stems from several sources, including fifteen years of professional work with ELLs, beginning with a project in Nogales, Arizona, a city cut in half by the United States-Mexico border. My first experience working with ELLs came as part of a university environmental reforestation project, and the primary goal, in addition to helping to bring back needed vegetation in the Nogales area, was to empower local residents with research, advocacy, and action to support their own environmental health campaigns. From this experience onward, my work with ELLs has been driven by a desire to infuse activism into my work and to empower learners with language to build their own capacities as parents, students, workers, and residents of their communities.

Fueled by this interest, I went on to earn a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and, as a graduate assistant and then as an instructor, I taught in the Program for Intensive English (PIE) for international students at Northern Arizona University. In the PIE there was a program-wide devotion to using feedback from both the students and their future mainstream course instructors to tailor instruction to meet students' academic and social needs as current and future members of the university. Although the students were geographically isolated from mainstream classes while in the PIE, the content of the classes and the pedagogical strategies employed in instruction were directly tied to aiding students' integration into their target academic COPs, and instructors' professional development was a high priority of the program.

After this experience, I worked in a primary charter school in the Phoenix metropolitan area as an English as a Second Language (ESL) “interventionist” with ELL children, where I felt frustrated by the lack of resources and expertise devoted to the school’s many ELLs. I worked on a para-educational level and was one of only a handful of teachers or staff who had any knowledge of English acquisition methodology or who spoke Spanish, the primary language of our ELLs. My interactions with each ELL were confined to thirty minutes each week, and I was provided with no information about the students’ needs in their classrooms to inform my work with them. Policies for ELLs in Arizona’s public schools are inflexible, allowing only one year of intensive English instruction for students to achieve a level of language mastery before they are expected to perform at the same levels in English as their native-speaking peers (Zehr, 2010). In the particular charter school where I worked, there were no specific guidelines in place for ELLs. In sharp contrast to my PIE experience, there was little emphasis on teacher professional development, little attention paid to the students’ immediate contexts, and no sense of community for the ELL students. This trend continues to be prevalent in all of my subsequent teaching experiences.

After moving to Virginia, I taught survival English in a Freirean-inspired English class at a community-based organization; I taught writing and grammar classes in developmental English-language departments in two community college systems; and I have worked for over a decade in professional development for adult education programs, including those that serve adult ELLs. Through all of these experiences several patterns emerge: a lack of funding and resources for English-language instruction; a practice of isolation of ELLs from mainstream groups; a lack of adequate training and support for teachers who work with ELLs; and a lack of input from the students themselves about what they want from their instructors or what they need

from their experiences in the classroom. In opposition to the intentions of the model, even the Freirean class was devoid of input from students about what they wanted to learn in their classes.

An additional motivator for my investment in this research comes from my own experience as a language learner both in foreign and domestic contexts. I earned my bachelor's degree in Spanish in Tucson, Arizona, during which time I studied abroad in Argentina, and after my master's, I briefly taught English as a Foreign Language in a small university in northeastern Ukraine. My two experiences living abroad were incredibly different: in Argentina, I interacted often with native speakers and participated in educational and social communities; in Ukraine, I was socially isolated much of the time and was rarely able to engage with native speakers aside from my host mother and her daughter. A likely contributor to the differences between the two experiences was the degree of cultural similarity. Urban Argentine culture and its social customs were familiar; the eastern Ukrainian culture of this particular small town was less openly social, and gatherings seemed to be restricted to families' homes and their close circles of friends and acquaintances. I also lived in a town where few foreigners visited, making me more of a novelty than a potential peer.

I remain acutely aware of many of the differences in experiences between an American English speaker traveling abroad and those of an immigrant or refugee coming to the United States. Especially in Argentina, I was often invited into social situations based primarily on my status as an American or as a native English speaker. My language and nationality held strong social currency, and I was able to make friends easily. In Ukraine, my status as an instructor at the university provided me with a certain amount of curious respect, although this did not translate into many social interactions. I left Ukraine after only a brief trial period, fearing that years of prolonged social isolation would turn me into a person my family and friends at home

would not recognize. In hindsight, I may have abandoned this assignment too early, but at the time I felt keenly the need for social interaction for my own personal well-being and did not regret leaving.

My most recent experience with language teaching was as a volunteer for a local refugee resettlement agency in Richmond, Virginia. I worked with a Congolese family for only a couple of months, generally spending three hours each Saturday afternoon with their family of six – a mother and her five children. While she and her children were motivated to learn and to engage with native speakers, they often complained that there were too many Congolese families in their neighborhood, which made it difficult to improve their English. It was also difficult to overcome the onslaught of logistical and cultural barriers that continued to confront them. The mother's work schedule was inconsistent and required her to be out of the house nights and many weekends, and it was difficult for them to maintain consistent access to supportive services because of her work schedule, as well as her lack of familiarity with American bureaucratic systems. The two oldest children, one in eighth grade and the other in ninth, complained of being treated unfairly by teachers and not understanding their course content; they also complained of feeling socially isolated at school, as if everyone were staring at them. They both expressed that their ESL classes were the only spaces where they felt comfortable.

Background Information on ELL Populations

The 2016 Current Population Survey (CPS), estimates that immigrants and their U.S.-born children now number approximately 84.3 million people, or 27 percent of the overall U.S. population (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). As the cultural and linguistic makeup of the national population shifts, so too does the makeup of local communities. According to 2009 – 2013 Census Bureau data (2015), there are more than 350 languages spoken in the United States,

and in many of our largest cities, English has become a minority language. Nationally, more than one in five people over the age of five speak a language other than English in the home, with Spanish as the top language at 37.5 million speakers (Sugarman & Lee, 2017).

The legal status of many ELLs makes exact numbers difficult to tabulate, but the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) (2016) estimates that there are 25.9 million Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals aged 5 and over in the country (nine percent of the U.S. population). Additionally, the MPI estimates that 11 million unauthorized immigrants resided in the United States in 2014, and approximately 5.1 million children under age 18 lived with an unauthorized immigrant parent between 2009 and 2013, representing seven percent of the U.S. child population. Important to note for this study, the term LEP will only be used in reference to data and other studies that utilize this term to refer to English learners. This study will instead use the term “English Language Learner (ELL)” to refer to individuals who are learning or who have learned English and to emphasize the learning aspect of the designation rather than a lack of English-language proficiency.

ELLs in education. In public education, ELLs constitute approximately 9.4 percent of the student body, or an estimated 4.6 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). As defined by Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), an ELL student is a learner between the ages of 3 and 21 who has difficulty communicating in and understanding the English language through written and oral means to a level that denies them the opportunity to “participate fully in society” and to “successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English” without language support (United States Department of Education, 2016). With a national LEP graduation rate nineteen percentage points lower than the overall graduation rate in the 2012-2013 academic year - the same rate as students with disabilities, and ten

percentage points lower than students characterized as experiencing economic disadvantage (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016) – the data show that ELL students, despite comprising a growing portion of the overall population, are achieving academically at rates much lower than their native-born peers.

Additionally, in a longitudinal study of ELLs' participation in postsecondary education, it was found that only one in eight ELLs earned a bachelor's degree compared with one in four English-proficient ELLs and one in three monolingual English speakers (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). These rates of educational attainment tie directly to earning potential, as well as to overall quality of individual life and the health of the local community (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010), leaving ELLs behind their English-speaking counterparts and making them more vulnerable in times of economic recession.

ELLs in the workforce. In 2015, immigrants accounted for nearly 17 percent (26.7 million) of the 160.6 million workers in the civilian labor force (Migration Policy Institute, 2016). Since 1970 immigrant workers have tripled their presence in the labor force, and in the fields of service, transportation, construction and material moving, they outnumber their native-born colleagues (Zong & Batalova, 2017). Additionally, the Pew Research Center estimates that in 2014 eight million undocumented workers also participated in the U.S. labor force, implying that an even larger share of the American workforce is foreign-born (Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2016).

The Brookings Institute (Wilson, 2014) reports that working-age LEP adults earn 25 to 40 percent less than their English proficient counterparts. LEP workers tend to concentrate in lower wage jobs than their monolingual peers, even though most LEP adults have a high school diploma, and 15 percent hold a college degree. Research on how adult ELLs in the labor force

learn and interact within their professional communities is extremely limited, and, as this population grows, and legislators and funders become increasingly interested in ELL employment trends, exploration into how ELLs interact within their professional communities is warranted (Mathews-Aydinli, 2008).

Public perceptions of ELLs. Recently, the national sentiment regarding immigration has shifted drastically to one of distrust and, at times, outright hostility (Krogstad, 2015). Perceptions about the value of immigrant populations vary wildly across the country with an almost equal split among the mainstream population in public opinion about the value of immigrants in local communities (Krogstad, 2015); however, it is the negative perceptions that often dominate the discussion of immigration in the media and permeate decision-making processes for national and local legislation, as well as inform policies for specific government institutions such as education (Krogstad, 2015).

Research indicates that if a community does not embrace its language learners, it is likely that teachers in that community will not embrace them either, directly impacting the quality of education that these students receive and the overall quality of life and health of their communities (Walker, Shafer, & Liams, 2004). This demonstrates that the acceptance of adult ELLs into communities is linked to the well-being of ELLs in the K-12 system through an iterative cycle of public perception and policy-making. In a cyclical fashion, how English learners fare in the public school system plays a significant role in their levels of acceptance and participation in mainstream communities as adults (Miller, Barnes, & Hartley, 2009), thus perpetuating patterns of exclusion between generations.

Education policies for ELLs. Education provides a particularly salient example of how public opinion on immigration has influenced policy. *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), a U.S. Supreme

Court case out of San Francisco, California, first challenged exclusionary practices in the public schools that left non-English speakers out of the educational system (Sugarman & Widess, 1974). This case expanded the scope of civil rights protection to include intentional or unintentional language-based exclusion from public education. Its legacy is uncertain, though, especially as non-English-speaking student populations grow. Two federal court rulings in particular have dismantled the already vague protections for ELLs established in *Lau v. Nichols*. In 1983, the court challenged the assumption under *Lau v. Nichols* that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act addresses both intentional discrimination and unintentional disparate impact; in the *Guardians Association v. Civil Service Commission* (1983) the Court ruled that Title VI authorizes compensatory relief only for intentional and purposeful discriminatory acts, not merely actions with adverse effects. Later in 2001, under *Alexander v. Sandoval*, the Court held that Congress did not use “clear and unambiguous language” to establish a private right to sue based on disparate impact; private plaintiffs may only sue for intentional discrimination, a right already guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment (Moran, 2005, p. 4). With these exceptions in place, ELL students’ rights to accessible education are not necessarily protected from negligence, only from intentional acts that deny them educational opportunities in comprehensible language.

Adult ELLs. The impacts of disparities in protections for ELL students continue to reveal themselves in adult ELL populations. Data on educational attainment, job wages, public perceptions, and educational policies reveal disparities in opportunities and outcomes for an increasingly large percentage of the overall population (Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Mathews-Aydinli, Krogstad, 2015; Miller, et al., 2009; 2008; Moran, 2005; Walker, Shafer, & Liams, 2004). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2013) estimates that by 2030 more than one in five workers will be an immigrant, and 20 million U.S. adults will be

ELLs. There is a growing need to focus on aligning educational policies and practices with the real needs of adult ELL populations.

Adult education in the United States. Outside of formal higher education institutions like universities and community colleges, there exists a network of publicly funded adult education programs in the United States that serves an estimated 667,515 English language learners nationally (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), a small portion of the estimated 20 million adult ELLs projected by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2013). Federal legislation recently reauthorized the funding for these programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and, as a part of that process, has realigned the goals and outcomes of adult English instruction to include unsubsidized employment and postsecondary credential attainment (WIOA, 2014). Despite the increase in the number of English learners in the country, funding for adult education programs has decreased steadily since 2009 (National Coalition for Literacy, 2017), and all fifty states maintain waiting lists for students whom they are currently unable to serve due to limited space and staffing (Foster & McLendon, 2012). Additionally, programmatic structures that are guided by standardized testing schedules do not allow for the flexibility many adult English learners need to accommodate their variable work schedules, family obligations, and other life circumstances (Condelli, Wrigley, Yoon, Cronen, & Seburn, 2017).

In all adult education contexts in which I have worked as either an instructor or a provider of professional development, ELLs are generally taught in ELL-only classrooms, isolated from mainstream English-speaking students, and programs are focused on achieving test-measured gains in English skills, rather than communicative competence for use outside of the classroom in the adults' immediate and everyday contexts. Additionally, the isolated teaching

environments that often characterize the adult English learner classroom are at odds with new federal outcome measures related to employment, which require interaction with contexts outside of the classroom (United States Department of Labor, 2014).

Research also points to a disconnect between federally mandated practice and effective pedagogical approaches. Condelli, et al. (2017) identify three practices that aligned with higher learning outcomes in adults: connection to the outside world, use of the student's native language for clarification in instruction, and varied practice and interaction. The absence of these vital practices leaves many ELLs in programs that offer little in the way of improving their present life circumstances through applicable language study. In the state where this study was conducted, the 2016 data show that less than half of the 11,114 enrolled adult ELLs remained in their programs long enough to post-test, and only 43 percent of those students demonstrated any gain in English-language skills (United States Department of Education, 2016). The need for a more responsive system that reflects the actual lived experiences of the English learners it serves and incorporates pedagogical practices that are shown to enhance language-learning outcomes is necessary to aid adult ELLs' transitions into life and work in the United States.

Rationale for the Study

Second language acquisition (SLA) theories overwhelmingly focus on cognitivist approaches to language learning that often simplify the phases of language acquisition and are removed from authentic, real-life contexts outside of formal educational environments (Norton, 2013). The same trend characterizes the SLA research landscape. As Watson-Gegeo (2004) notes,

the limits placed by prior, and often contemporary, SLA research on what counts as context typically derive from a positivistic, experimental model of research that attempts

to control variables rather than account for the complexities of people's real lived situations, and, in any case, reflects a felt need to reduce complexity in order to arrive at firm, codable categories (p. 340).

The adult language-acquisition process, particularly with adults who are not part of an intensive English language learning program, occurs in contexts that are often separated from formal learning institutions; they occur as parts of everyday lived experiences. And, while there is some research that touches on sections of these lived experiences in workplace and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton 1995, 2011, 2013), there remains a need to better understand the full learning experience of adult ELLs in English-speaking countries.

Learning is a primarily social process (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and communities of practice (COPs) are an essential piece of that learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In the process of English language acquisition, native English speakers act as the gatekeepers to cultural understandings and language knowledge for English learners. However, research has shown that, at least in the process of language acquisition, native speakers do not often act as willing collaborators in ELLs' language-learning processes in that they do not use their knowledge of the English language to help strengthen newcomers' language skills or to communicate effectively (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) found that English-speaking "old-timers" did not often correct language inaccuracies or misunderstandings with learners. In his research, he found that in most cases ELLs were expected to bear the brunt of the burden of communication, a difficult task for many who are unfamiliar with the language and social norms of American work and social communities. With the understanding that learning occurs in

interaction with others, the question then remains as to how and where adult ELLs who are not participating in intensive English-education programs acquire language.

Adult ELLs remain a largely understudied population, and the academic scholarship on the adult SLA process often lacks a theoretical basis, making it difficult to answer questions surrounding their learning processes, external factors that impact learning, and effective approaches to integrate adult ELLs into mainstream contexts (Mathews-Aydinli, 2008). The experiences of adult ELLs as they navigate access into their multiple COPs are generally missing from educational and sociological research. In traditional SLA, “other social identities of individuals (e.g., mothers, brothers, friends, employers, journalists, professors) engaged in using and learning an L2 [second language] were ignored” (Swain and Deters, 2007, p. 820). Context is inseparable from learners’ participation in processes of language acquisition (Morita, 2004, p. 596). What is needed is research that begins to paint the complex picture of adult English-learning contexts, so that educational policies and practices can better align to the actual experiences and needs of adults, thus increasing their capacity to achieve in their educational, work, and other civic COPs.

Overview of the Literature

Swain and Deters (2007) present a “participation metaphor” for learning, arguing that “learning is a process of becoming a member of a community, and this process involves developing the ability to communicate through the language and behavior that are deemed acceptable by the community” (p. 823). The theoretical framework for this study is built on two fundamental concepts: COPs and identity negotiation. Wenger (1998) explicitly draws out the relevance of the theories of social structure, situated experience, practice, and identity (p. 12), creating an axis of theories that lays the foundation for a contextual examination of adult ELL

language acquisition processes. This research will draw heavily on Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) and their work on COPs and situated learning. Their notion of a COP is informed by learners' experiences as parts of specific communities who share common goals and a common set of practices and social norms. They use the term legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) to describe a learner's inbound trajectory within a COP. This trajectory begins as a newcomer with peripheral responsibilities and limited knowledge and then grows to a level of mastery with support from fellow COP members that allows the newcomer to become an "old-timer" and eventually to replace the previous generation of COP members. Lave and Wenger describe this kind of trajectory as situated learning and as a process for identity negotiation.

In addition to the COP framework for situated learning, the study will use Norton's work on identity negotiation (1995, 2011, 2013) to examine this process in ELLs' COPs. Language learning, in particular, is a continual process of identity construction, and learners' access to and investment in their COPs determines to a great extent the kinds of identities they will assume as they move along their learning trajectories (Norton, 2011). Wenger (1998) expands the idea of COPs to incorporate the impacts of learners' levels of acceptance, patterns of participation, and trajectories toward (or away from) COP membership across a person's many communities, and Norton (2013) adds a temporal dimension to this nexus of communities with a discussion of a learner's investments in past and future "imagined identities," which, she argues, are often the most influential forces in a learner's motivation to persist.

Studies on adult ELLs' integration into mainstream contexts focus primarily on the contexts themselves and how immigrant groups are unable to achieve legitimacy within them (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Morita, 2004; Norton, 2001; Samimy, et al., 2011). While the majority of studies on adult ELLs focus on the barriers to their legitimate participation in COPs, there are

two in particular that highlight inclusive ELL COPs (Samimy, et al., 2011; Black, 2005). Two unique factors characterize the COPs featured in these studies as inclusive of ELLs: explicit and intensive support from both native speakers and from other ELLs in the COP; and a focus on a common interest, rather than on linguistic or cultural factors, as the defining characteristic for membership. In this research, ELLs were encouraged to embrace their international experience as a defining element of their identities as English speakers and to focus on their strengths in relation to the COPs' common interests – in these two cases, academic scholarship and fiction writing - rather than to participate from the position of a perceived English-language deficit.

These studies highlight opportunities for discovering some of what works when primarily Anglophone COPs are effectively integrated with non-English-speaker newcomers. However, there is a need to add to this body of knowledge and expand it to develop more policy-directed and pedagogical guidance for working with adult ELLs in ways that increase their levels of legitimacy and participation within COPs such as educational institutions, workplaces, and other civic situations in the larger community. Additionally, the studies on adults in COPs tend to focus on a single isolated situation; none so far have explored the roles that ELLs' multiple COPs play in their identities and participation patterns as they gain access to new COPs.

Critical Theory and Bourdieusian Concepts as a Lens to Examine Access

Norton (1995), whose work on social identity in the language acquisition process greatly informed this project, argued that her data reinforced the notion that “power relations play a crucial role in social interactions between language learners and target language speakers” (p. 12), including the access ELLs have to target language and target culture. This research utilized critical theory as a lens to examine access that ELLs have to target-language, mainstream COPs,

as well as the Bourdieusian concepts of the social field, cultural capital, and habitus to examine patterns of participation and the processes of identity negotiation within and between COPs.

Critical theory and ELLs. Critical theoretical perspectives focus on the oppression of groups who lack the power and voice to advocate on their own behalves. The critical theory framework “emerged as a contestation of the increasing imposition of the dominant narrative in society” (Giroux, 2012, p. viii) that has the power to silence ELLs and marginalize their contributions to COPs. In education, the primary objective of critical theory is to “empower the powerless” (Merriam, 2007) through an examination of barriers to legitimate access to communities and a focus on how to achieve access to desired communities. With this lens, this research will seek to understand the processes through which ELLs overcome barriers to gain legitimate access to COPs.

Many factors contribute to the institutional structures and attitudinal biases that impact ELLs’ experiences in COPs. Jim Cummins (2000) writes that “in the United States...diversity has been constructed as the ‘enemy within,’ far more important than any external enemy in its threat to the fabric of nationhood” (p. 3), and McLaren (2012), writing about educational models of assimilation, discusses the “fear of the ‘brown wave’ of immigration that could wash over ‘Americans’ inexorably and extinguish their identities” adding that “consequently, there is a strong emphasis on nationalism and the acculturation and assimilation of Latina/os to the American Way of Life” (p. 191), a trend that threatens any valuation of minority cultures or languages. Public opinion regarding immigrant groups can lead to very real impacts in institutions where ELLs interact with native-born English speakers, and research on mainstream public schools reveals the potential damage biased perceptions can cause (Cummins, 2000; Krogstad, 2015; McLaren, 2012; Ovando & McLaren, 2000). Thus, examining the communities

to which a population that is very often marginalized from mainstream opportunities has access necessitates a critical lens that will consider the many political and societal barriers to that access.

Bourdieu and language. As an additional component to a critical lens in the examination of COPs, Bourdieu's concepts of the social field, cultural capital, and habitus are valuable in identifying potential reasons for access, lack of access, participation, and non-participation in COP activities. He relates his concepts directly to the power of language to grant or deny access to certain COPs, which are similar to Bourdieu's "social fields." Critiquing the field of linguistics and language acquisition, Bourdieu argues,

In place of *grammaticalness* it puts the notion of acceptability, or, to put it another way, in place of the language (langue), the notion of the *legitimate* language. In place of *relations of communication* (or symbolic interaction) it puts *relations of symbolic power*, and so replaces the *meaning* of speech with the question of the *value* and *power* of speech (1977, p. 646). [italics in the original]

Here Bourdieu argues that the field of linguistics and language acquisition designates different levels of legitimacy or acceptability to different language forms within particular social spheres. The insistence on a legitimate language within any field of study or within any community creates exclusionary practices that privilege insiders and, without support from other members, stymies the successful integration of newcomers who lack that specific linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital – one's place of power within a field of interactions – largely determines and is determined by one's capacity to produce "legitimate language" (1977, p. 646). He argues that a practical mastery of grammar is useless without an

accompanying mastery of the conditions for the infinite possibilities of its use. In other words, without repeated exposure to, practice with, and feedback on the acceptability of one's speech and actions within a community, one cannot gain entrance into that community. This presents a double bind for language learners in that one cannot truly gain access to a community without the appropriate language and cultural knowledge, and the language and cultural knowledge cannot be gained without access to the communities in which it is used.

Habitus, or one's set of learned behaviors, is the third Bourdieusian concept that is relevant for this study. Habitus, with language as an essential and predominant component, determines to a great extent one's access to specific communities. Differences in habitus give individuals varying social connections, educational practices, and cultural skills, and these connections, practices, and skills are transformed into hierarchical degrees of value or capital. Writing on the special role of speaking in habitus, Bourdieu (1977) writes that "...he extends his notion of habitus to speaking, to encompass one's sense of the value that is likely to be attributed to what one has to say in a particular situation" (p. 128). He discusses the

differential social valuing of languages, genres, and styles of speaking, and he emphasizes the habitual, out-of-awareness assessments one makes before and during conversation: judgements of the linguistic forms that are likely to be valued, of one's command over those linguistic resources, and of the social privilege (or lack thereof) that a person of one's relative position has to employ such resources (p. 128).

Here Bourdieu spells out exactly how ELLs, even those with higher levels of English-language abilities, are essentially exposed as outsiders by other members of communities to which they may aspire to belong. He argues that constant silent assessments of others' appropriateness within a community are carried out by all members, thus complicating full membership for

language learners in interactions with native speakers. Bourdieu's concepts are consistent with critical theory in that they both acknowledge oppressive forces, whether institutional or social, that inhibit minority and marginalized populations from gaining access to mainstream COPs that consist of members from dominant or majority social classes. Without access to a COP, ELLs in particular cannot learn the behavioral and linguistic cues that signal membership, and without tacit knowledge of those cues, they cannot gain COP access, thus perpetuating a cycle of non-belonging as an outsider.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to develop a better understanding of how adult ELLs negotiate their identities within and between their multiple COPs. With a deeper understanding of the realities that comprise the ELL experience, including communities to which ELLs feel they belong and communities to which they aspire to belong, as well as knowledge about how they perceive their identities to shift within and between their COPs, it is hoped that educational policies and adult learning theories may be developed that more closely align with the actual needs of adult ELL groups. Learning, and in particular language learning, is shaped by interactions with others, the types of activities engaged in as members of communities, and the identities that are espoused in relation to membership in and affiliation with COPs. To examine the central phenomenon of identity negotiation for adult ELLs in their COPs, this study explored the following overarching research question and sub-questions:

How do adult ELLs negotiate identities within and between their COPs?

- What do adult English learners perceive to be their COPs?
- What are learners' perceptions of their identities as English learners and speakers? How do these perceptions shift in different COPs?

- How do patterns of participation fluctuate within and between adult ELLs' COPs?
- How do adult ELLs' patterns of participation in their COPs align with their perceptions of their identities as ELLs and English speakers?

Methodology

The study's methodology was guided by its purpose to better understand the lived experiences of adult ELLs as members of multiple COPs. This study focused on the levels of participation that ELLs engage in, the kinds of identities they assume within and between communities, and the access they have to supportive COPs. As little is known about the nature of language acquisition in the adult ELL population outside of higher education settings, a multiple case study design with a constructivist/interpretivist approach that emphasizes participants' perspectives provided the flexibility to follow themes in the data as they emerge.

Sample. A list of specific criteria drove initial recruitment, and as data collection commenced and themes emerged, the criteria were expanded to incorporate additional perspectives. To build on the research already conducted in the field of social identity and adult ELLs, the sample population consisted of adult ELLs who have participated in some form of English language instruction after having moved to the United States and had achieved some form of perceived legitimacy as a member of an English-speaking community. As a goal of this research was to learn more about how adult ELLs have gained legitimate access to their COPs, participants also needed to have achieved a level of English mastery that enabled them to work and live collaboratively with native English speakers. Participants were identified and recruited through contacts at a local refugee resettlement agency and a large publicly funded adult English-language education program. An initial sample of eight participants was recruited; six of the eight continued throughout the entire study period.

Data collection and analysis. Data collection consisted of four parts: three semi-structured interviews with all participants, reflexive researcher field notes, participant self-reports done either in writing or audio-recorded, and reflective feedback from participants on the findings. The interviews and self-reports were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded for emerging themes, and analysis for themes was conducted using Atlas.ti. Interviews and field notes were written up phenomenologically to ensure a record of the intersubjective nature of researcher-participant interactions (Vagel, 2014). To allow for the collection of rich data, a small initial sample size was targeted (N = 8), and the data collection occurred over the span of three months. Five adult ELLs participated in all three interviews and also submitted recorded self-reflections at the second and third interviews. Two participated in the first two interviews, and another only participated in the first interview.

An initial protocol guided the first round of semi-structured interviews; however, information gleaned from each interview informed questions included in subsequent interviews as a way to reflect emergent themes as they arose. The first interview focused on current and past identity positions, in addition to participant-identified themes. A second interview, scheduled six weeks later, included a discussion of initial findings from the first round of interviews, as well as new discussion related to themes of current and future identity positions. A final interview, six weeks after the second, was held with each participant to serve as both a final member check and as an opportunity to reflect on how the research process had impacted the participants themselves. Three sets of interviews and weekly self-reflections allowed for multiple reflections on themes from the participants themselves, in particular, changes in their self-perceptions of identity and community-belonging over time. Member checks were conducted both orally and in

writing depending on participants' literacy levels and comfort with written English, and feedback from these discussions informed subsequent and final analyses.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are foundational to the design, implementation, and analysis of this study.

1. A community of practice (COP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) is used to signify a context for situated learning wherein “old-timers” work with “newcomers” to pass down the skills, nuances, community-specific language, and special understandings of a specific craft. Wenger (1998) adds that several indicators exist to signal the formation of a COP, among them “sustained mutual relationships” and “shared ways of engaging and doing things together” and “mutually defining identities” (p. 125). From welders to primary school educators to members of support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, COPs serve as the medium through which learning is passed on to new members; old-timers pass on their acquired knowledge to new members, allowing them to acquire mastery and, in many circumstances, to replace them as the masters in a COP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

In the adult English-learning context, where English and cultural acquisition are goals of participation, the structure of a COP is more difficult to define. A COP for adult ELLs outside of formalized institutions of learning, like English-language classes, includes spaces where ELLs are able to observe and progressively participate more fully in a community in the target language and culture. ELLs' work environments, neighborhood organizations, their children's schools, and churches all serve as examples of English-speaking COPs where they have the opportunity to learn language and culture

and to work toward fuller participation in those communities. Other spaces, such as doctor's offices or informal interactions with others in public spaces may not constitute a COP, because the opportunity to learn from others in interaction over time is not present.

Legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within a COP serves as a vehicle to examine how ELLs engage in the varying levels of participation that characterize their daily experiences. In LPP, "peripheral" is a positive term that implies a level of supported participation along an inbound trajectory toward full membership within a COP. A newcomer is gradually granted increasing levels of responsibility and legitimacy; participation is peripheral, as opposed to marginal, until learners have acquired certain levels of mastery through growing involvement (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Watson-Gegeo (2004) utilizes LPP to examine ELLs' access to COPs, emphasizing the importance of access to "participatory roles in expert performances" of the knowledge and skills within a COP (p. 341).

LPP does not necessarily imply membership in a COP but rather the ability to participate more fully with others toward common goals using common language and behaviors. For ELLs in particular, a desire for LPP does not necessarily imply a desire for COP membership but rather a desire to have opportunities to participate in ways that signify legitimacy as an individual in interaction with others. For example, an adult ELL may desire to be listened to and treated fairly by staff at their children's schools or by English-speaking co-workers at work, but this does not assume they also desire to become a full participant in these COPs. LPP may lead to full participation in a COP, but it is not the only goal of participation; legitimacy rather than marginalization is also a goal of participation with others.

2. Identity Negotiation from Norton (1995, 2011, 2013) can be defined as “a site of struggle” (2013, p. 7) where individuals negotiate their past, present, and imagined future identities within the situational parameters of their immediate contexts. In relation to the contexts of many ELLs, she defines language as “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (2013, p. 4); language is the primary vehicle for participation in one’s COPs. In this study, identity negotiation is examined in conjunction with an ELL’s ways of participation within their COP.

Summary

The impetus for this study stems from my experiences as a language learner, a language instructor, and a professional in adult education, as well as my concerns about marginalizing processes that impact the adult ELL population. Of primary interest is my desire to work toward the implementation of policies and instructional practices that will better align to adult ELLs’ lived experiences and real needs.

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of situated learning with COPs and Wenger’s 1998 discussion of the nexus of multiple COPs, along with Norton’s (1995, 2011, 2013) work on identity negotiation in language learning together served as the foundation of the theoretical framework for this study. Participation is an integral component of both COP membership and identity negotiation, and questions regarding types of participation were utilized during data collection as a means for gauging learning trajectories within and between ELLs’ COPs. The purpose of the work is to begin to develop understandings of the multiple communities that comprise the adult ELL experience, the identities and the processes of identity negotiation that adult ELLs experience in their communities, and how the processes of identity negotiation in one

COP play a role in the processes of identity negotiation in their other COPs. As a way to examine ELLs' access to the COPs and as a way to frame processes of identity negotiation in relation to issues of power within COPs, critical theory and the Bourdieusian concepts of social field, cultural capital, and habitus were used as a lens, one that aligned closely with the study's findings and colored the major implications of this research.

An emergent, constructivist approach drove data collection, allowing for the incorporation of new themes into interviews, data analysis, and feedback loops with the participants (Rodwell, 1998). In order to more fully explore the process of identity negotiation within multiple COPs, this study focused on a small sample size (N = 8) to collect rich data over a period of three months in order to best capture changes in participants' perceptions of identity and of their access to COPs.

It is hoped that this study will help fill a real need in the scant literature on adult English language acquisition to provide a basis for sound educational policies and instructional practices that will more accurately align with ELLs' experiences as they negotiate their identities as learners, parents, siblings, workers, neighbors, friends, foreigners, and residents within and between multiple COPs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The many concepts embedded in the theoretical framework require explanation, because they serve as the backbone for the rationale and the methodology of this research. The first section of the literature review is devoted to an explanation of the theoretical framework, followed by a description of the concepts that relate directly to work with ELL groups. The next section describes examples of inclusive COPs for ELLs, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the research methods utilized in this kind of work and the applicability of each to the research questions in this study.

Method of the Review of the Literature

An assigned reading in a seminar on adult learning motivated this approach to research with ELLs. Lave and Wenger's 1991 *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* presents a framework for examining how learning takes place within specific COPs, a contextual approach to examining participation, learning, and agency. Additionally, in my previous research with ELLs and workforce education, I have used Bonnie Norton's studies to explore issues of identity in adult learning. The works of these two scholars served as a starting point for this review. Using terms and ideas from their works, as well as studies cited in their literature reviews

and reference lists, I searched for articles and books through Google Scholar, JStor, ProQuest, and ERIC, a database for educational research. Search terms included combinations of the following: *English learners, English acquisition, second language acquisition, identity, social identity, communities of practice, access to communities of practice, and situated learning*. There were no date restrictions on the resources used, as much of the most relevant research was conducted more than twenty years ago. Because of the scant amount of research available on adult ELL populations, studies from K-12 contexts were sparingly included to illustrate some of the concepts of the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

An Exploration of Identity Negotiation in Adult English Learners' Communities of Practice

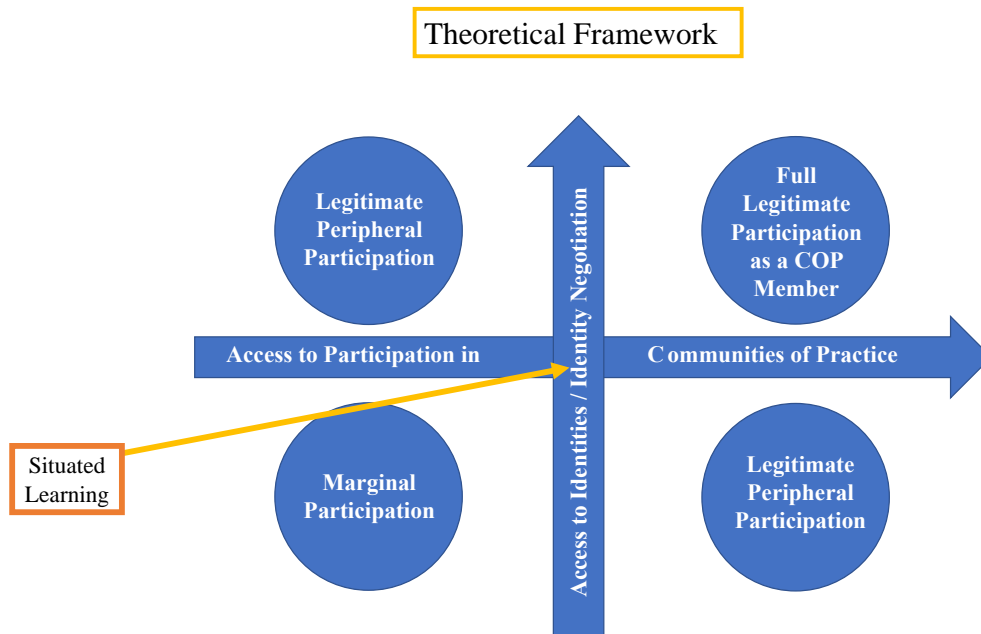


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the study

As shown in Figure 1, the theoretical framework for this study is based on two overarching and intersecting concepts: access to COPs as spaces for situated learning and the role of identity negotiation in situated learning. Participation, placed in each of the four

quadrants, is an essential and intrinsic component of both COP theory and identity theory, so it will be treated not as a separate concept, but as a fundamental element embedded within the other two. Situated learning is what occurs at the intersections of participation in COPs and identity negotiation, and its impacts shift as access changes along the horizontal and vertical axes.

COPs

The foundational work on COPs comes from Lave and Wenger (1991) who offer a context for situating learning called a “community of practice” (COP) wherein “old-timers” work with “newcomers” to pass down the skills, nuances, community-specific language, and special understandings of a specific craft. Wenger (1998) adds that several indicators exist to signal the formation of a COP, among them “sustained mutual relationships” and “shared ways of engaging and doing things together” and “mutually defining identities” (p. 125). From welders to primary school educators to members of support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, COPs serve as the medium through which learning is passed on to new groups of members; old-timers pass on their acquired knowledge to new members, allowing them to acquire mastery and, in many circumstances, replace them as the masters in a COP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Lave and Wenger place learning and identity negotiation within a network of human (i.e., individuals) and non-human actors (i.e., cultural and historical fields), where “motivation to learn stems from culturally valued practices in which something valuable is produced” (Engestrom, 2001, p. 141).

Wenger (1998) expands this idea to incorporate the notion that one’s level of participation and identity within one COP can and does permeate one’s participation and identity in other COPs. He focuses on the nexus of communities that make up a person’s daily life,

including those that characterized a person's past experiences and those to which an individual imagines or aspires to belong.

Identity Negotiation

Norton's conception of identity negotiation in language acquisition comprises the second part of the theoretical framework. She sees identity as "a site of struggle" (2013, p. 7) where individuals negotiate their past, present, and imagined future identities within the situational parameters of their immediate contexts, and she defines language as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (2013, p. 4); language is the primary vehicle for participation in one's COPs. Swain and Deters (2007) write that "...learning involves the (re)construction of identities...[and] the participation of newcomers also entails changes and transformation of the community." Learning and identity construction are conflictual processes both for the individual learner and for the community in that the incorporation of new identities requires a change in social structure.

To best express the rationale for using Norton's 2013 work on identity specifically for research with language learners, included here is a summary of her arguments for how identity research is inextricably tied to language learning and should be considered integral to SLA research. The incorporation of identity theory into SLA allows for an exploration of the multiple positions from which language learners can speak and how marginalized learners can "appropriate desirable identities with respect to the target community" (p. 2). This approach also allows for an exploration of how the power of learners in one site may aid their agency in another site; how "identity, practices, and resources are mutually constitutive"; how agency may lead to more powerful identities from which to speak; how investment in language learning is

socially constructed; and how motivation to learn language can be understood in the context of imagined communities and imagined identities that push learners toward desired communities (p. 2).

In complement to Norton's work on identity and Wenger's (1998) nexus of multi-membership, the anthropological work of Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) directs its "focus on the development of identities and agency specific to practices and activities situated in ... socially enacted, culturally constructed 'worlds': recognized fields or frames of social life..." (p. 7). They explain that people are constantly exposed to "competing and differentially powerful and authoritative discourses and practices of self" (p. 29) and that "...people's representations of themselves in the stream of everyday life reveal a multitude of selves that are neither bounded, stable, enduring, nor impermeable" (p. 29). They argue that identities are mapped by our participation and our agency in socially produced activities. Their work reinforces Norton's conception that it is our participation in socially and culturally defined communities that defines us from moment to moment. The proposed study here is built upon this foundational understanding of the roles of social communities in shaping identities.

COPs, Identity Negotiation, and Situated Learning

Wenger (1998) writes that "in spite of curriculum, discipline, and exhortation, the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice" (p. 6). However, learners must be granted the legitimacy to be treated as potential members in COPs (p. 101). Gaining legitimacy within a COP is not a seamless process, and as Morita (2004) argues, it is "always implicated in social structures involving power relations" (p. 577). Access to legitimate participation within a COP

is likely to involve struggles over access to resources, conflicts and negotiations between differing viewpoints arising from differing degrees of experience and expertise, and transformations of a given academic community's practices as well as of the participants' identities (Morita, 2004, p. 577).

Watson-Gegeo (2004) contributes to this line of reasoning by pointing out that no language learning is context-free, and all communicative acts involve social and political dimensions that impact the forms of language available to learners (p. 340). Learners use language that is available to them, and many instructional and workplace environments constrain the types of language available to learners, further inhibiting legitimate access to COPs. Different learners are granted different levels of access and legitimacy depending on the organization of social power within a COP (Bourdieu, 1977; Samimy, et al., 2011; Toohey, 1998 Watson-Gegeo, 2004), and the status of "outsider" is often reified in subtle ways through barriers to participation (Wenger, 1998, p. 104), blocking legitimate access and contributing to the construction of an outsider identity.

How Concepts of the Theoretical Framework Inform ELL Research

Studies on adult ELLs' integration into mainstream contexts focus primarily on the nature of the contexts themselves and how immigrant groups are unable to achieve legitimacy within them (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Morita, 2004; Norton, 2001; Samimy, et al., 2011). There exists an assumption in much of the research that institutional COPs, like schools and workplaces, are the primary COPs to which ELLs strive to gain legitimacy, which may be true in many cases; however, they rarely focus on the variety of COPs that ELLs may access (e.g., churches, neighborhoods, refugee and immigrant volunteer organizations, family lives, past COPs, future COPs) and how those COPs impact their identities and learning trajectories between their other

COPs - a complex set of relationships where the interactions in one COP permeate the patterns of participation and identity formation in other COPs. There is also the influence of past COP experiences and future-oriented goals, both of which impact self-perceptions and identity formation (Norton, 2011). Though much research focuses on barriers to COPs, current studies on ELLs do not ask the deceptively complex question, what are the many COPs to which ELLs actually belong or to which they desire to belong?

Situated Learning and the Adult ELL

Learning constitutes engagement in the practices of specific communities, and knowing involves active participation in COPs. Wenger (1998) describes COPs as integral parts of everyday life that are often both informal and pervasive so that we do not recognize them as such. He writes that they generally do not come with explicit requirements for membership; however, when we reflect on our regular social interactions, it is likely that we can name communities in which we are members, identify who other members are, and can likely enumerate several characteristics that define membership (Wenger, 1998).

Legitimate peripheral participation. Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) within COPs can serve as a vehicle to examine how ELLs engage in the varying levels of participation that characterize their daily experiences. In LPP, "peripheral" is a positive term that implies a level of supported participation along an inbound trajectory toward full membership within a COP. A newcomer is gradually granted increasing levels of responsibility and legitimacy; participation is peripheral, as opposed to marginal, until learners have acquired certain levels of mastery through growing involvement (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Watson-Gegeo (2004) utilizes LPP to examine ELLs' access to COPs, emphasizing the

important of access to “participatory roles in expert performances” of the knowledge and skills within a COP (p. 341). This access is uncertain yet crucial for full membership.

Situated activity and LPP. Lave and Wenger define learning as “situated activity”, and through their concept of LPP, learners participate in COPs to gain mastery of knowledge and skills in a trajectory of movement from “newcomer” status to “old-timer.” Learning involves “becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice” (1991, p. 29), and their conception of situated learning requires that, rather than merely receiving knowledge about the world, “agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other” (1991, p. 33). This means that learning requires action within social contexts that constitute a COP into which the learner gains entrance and through which the learner progresses from a newcomer to an old-timer by acting within the culture, speaking the language, and mastering the skills necessary to work alongside and in common purpose with other COP members. Learning in this sense is “engagement in social practice” (1991, p. 35) and involves the “construction of identities” (p. 53) as the learners become more entrenched in the social practices of a COP. Lave and Wenger write that “social practice is the primary, generative phenomenon, and learning is one of its characteristics” (p. 34). The social and identity-laden nature of learning are what can make it especially difficult when linguistic communication and common cultural understandings are missing, as is often the case with adult ELLs in mainstream situations that involve native-born and native-English-speaking co-participants.

Lave and Wenger write that

legitimate peripherality is a complex notion, implicated in social structures involving relations of power. As a place in which one moves toward more intensive participation, peripherality is an empowering position. As a place in which one is kept from

participating more fully – often legitimately, from the broader perspective of society at large – it is a disempowering position (1991, p. 36).

LPP inherently involves “relations of power” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36) where newcomers are dependent upon old-timers in the COP for admittance, guidance, knowledge, and growth. A natural tension arises when newcomers gain mastery within a COP and threaten the established social order in that there must be some amount of displacement to allow for newcomers to become the expert old-timers.

Identity Negotiation in COPs

Identity negotiation is an integral component of situational learning and is inseparable from issues of community and practice. Wenger (1998) writes that we define ourselves both through our participation and our non-participation, our community membership, and by what is familiar or unfamiliar to us. He continues that our identities are constructed by both our past experiences and our futures and that identity is a “nexus of membership,” defined by how we “reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity” (p. 149).

In English language classrooms, Norton (2013) found that a great challenge for instructors is to identify “identity positions [that] offer the greatest opportunity for social engagement and interaction. Conversely, if there are identity positions that silence students, then teachers need to investigate and address these marginalizing practices” (p. 16). In this way, the language classroom is not only an instructional system, but it also serves as social practice in which identities are negotiated within a community of learners. Norton argues that language instructors should strive to help learners locate identities that allow them to reimagine their futures and position them in ways that give them access to those identities and those COPs that

will provide them with the situational learning opportunities they need to achieve their future identities (2013). This requires a knowledge of what constitutes a learners' COPs.

Social identity and access to COPs. Norton (2013) writes that there exist “larger material conditions that can serve to constrain or enable the range of identity positions available to students” (p. 16). The social category into which one perceives she fits can both describe and prescribe one's actions and attitudes as a member of any group (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). For ELLs, in particular, English-language deficiency can become a defining characteristic which relegates them to an “out-group” that is discriminated against by the language majority “in-group”, either overtly or through mere lack of recognition. For example, in the K-12 environment, Ovando and McClaren (2000) found that the extraction of ELL students from their core subjects for separate ESL classes was not only disruptive to their learning but also reinforced the perception of English learners' “otherness”. They found that, in addition to labeling students as “ESL students,” the pull-out classes limited opportunities for engagement with native speakers and with core academic content.

Wenger (1998) writes that the “politics of participation” include a range of variables such as influence, discrimination, friendship, trust, and ambition (p. 91). He argues that identity is a locus of social power in that it allows an individual to belong, to be a certain kind of person, and to claim legitimacy within a COP. Social identity is also limiting in that the COPs to which we belong, to which we are excluded, and to which we aspire to belong shape how we define ourselves. Social identity construction is inherently conflictual and remains open to negotiation, giving the power of social identity a dual structure that mirrors the “interplay between identification and negotiability” (p. 207). We are defined by our access to legitimacy within

COPs in ways that help us to learn but also in ways that limit our capacities to assume other identities.

Lave and Wenger write that “learning thus implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations” (1991, p. 53). The “otherizing” systems like those in K-12 ESL classes offer few possibilities for interaction on equal footing with native-English speakers, where members of a learning institution are valued for their contributions, and this persistent inequality, in turn, impacts identity formation, reproducing a hierarchical social system (p. 47). Exploring the roots of student identity construction, Wolfe (2011) writes that subjectivities are created by institutional practices that do the work of making a particular person be seen (and perhaps see herself) in a particular way (e.g., intelligent or incompetent). Writing specifically about secondary ESL classrooms, Wolfe (2011) argues that “institutional practices, for the most part, are designed to deny access of resources to specific groups of people” (p. 79). It is worth exploring how isolating educational practices may impact identity formation in adult ELL groups as they move outside of the school context and into their social and professional worlds.

ELL identity negotiation and access to COPs. There is an intrinsic tension to conceptions of social identity. “Building an identity consists of negotiating meanings of our experience of membership in social communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 145). COP membership then is both “enabling and limiting of identity” (p. 207), and it serves as a resource but at a cost. Hougaard (2009) writes that achieving legitimacy in a group is a matter of becoming someone worth listening to and speaking to, and this is often a struggle for English learners in their interactions with native English speakers. ELLs are often characterized primarily by their non-native English language skills and not by their identities as adults, students, professionals,

friends, or neighbors. Labels like “limited English proficient” and “English deficient” categorize whole groups of people based on a deficiency, inhibiting their capacity to engage with native English speakers in ways that do not situate them as subordinate or otherized, and impacting both their learning and identity negotiation trajectories (Olneck, 1993; Ovando & McLaren, 2000).

Norton (2013) contends that “...it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self with and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak” (p. 45). However, these networks are not readily available to most ELLs. Linguistic studies often assume ample opportunities for exposure and practice with target language forms; however, competence-building opportunities rarely exist in language learners’ social spheres (Bourdieu, 1977). As ELLs are often physically isolated from legitimate participation, they are also often consequently relegated to otherizing modes of being, apart from power-holding groups, impacting their self-identity construction patterns.

Investment in identity. Lave and Wenger (1991) write that identities are developed not only “through the practices we engage in but also through the practices we do not engage in” (p. 164). When communities are arranged so that ELLs are positioned as outsiders – and not newcomers – their LPP in a COP is compromised. Bonnie Norton (2013) conceptualizes participation and non-participation within COPs as symptomatic of an individual’s investment in a specific COP. Norton uses “the term identity to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 45). She defines investment for ELLs as the “socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language” (2001, p. 166) and argues that investment in a target language is also an investment in the learner’s own

identity transformation. “If learners invest in a second language, they do so with an understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital” and enhance their access to “hitherto unattainable resources” (Norton, 2013, p. 50).

Imagined identity. Norton ties the idea of investment to what she terms “imagined identity” which includes membership in an “imagined community” (2011, p. 167), and Wenger (1998) defines imagination as a process of self-expansion that transcends time and space and allows us to create new images of ourselves and of our communities. He argues that imagination has the potential to transcend patterns of engagement. Imagination is also social, involving a kind of belonging that expands how we are related to one another. Lave and Wenger (1991) conceive of learning as a social and identity-shifting practice, and when social situations preclude membership to a COP into which ELLs are invested, this has the potential to damage both their imagined identities and their desire to learn the language of the COPs of their lived-in worlds.

Samimy, et al. (2011) writes that ELLs who leave their home countries and move into English-speaking societies invest heavily in their possible worlds. He found that ELLs’ “self-image, self-confidence, and their own professional legitimacy were differential, depending on the community they decided to invest in – their imagined community” (p. 560). Norton (2001) found that learners felt most uncomfortable interacting with and speaking with people in whom they have the greatest investment (p. 170), for it is those people who hold the power to either admit or exclude them from membership into their imagined COPs. Exclusion would challenge their imagined identities, and, as Norton discovered, would often lead to resistance and non-participation in English-language and culturally socializing activities (1995, 2001, 2013).

Imagined communities. Kanno and Norton (2003) define “imagined communities” as groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom individuals connect through their imaginations and through their investments in these communities. Wenger (1998) identifies imagination as an important source of community, writing that imagination is a process “of expanding oneself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves” (p. 176). In contrast to Lave and Wenger’s 1991 framework of situated learning, which involves participation in an immediately accessible community with concrete relationships, Kanno and Norton examine how investment in and affiliation with imagined communities impacts ELLs’ learning trajectories (2003). These communities include future relationships and future social and professional positions that exist within the learner’s imagination; they transcend geographic boundaries and concrete local relationships. They argue that imagined communities are no less real than the ones in which learners engage daily, and these communities may even play a stronger role in a learner’s investment and consequently their current actions and behaviors (p. 242).

Identity Negotiation between Multiple COPs

Wenger (1998) expanded the COP framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to encompass the multiple communities – present, past, and future – that characterize the individual experience of social identity. He writes that we belong to many COPs, some more fully than others, and some in marginal capacities with little chance for full membership. His conception of identity “entails an experience of multi-membership and the work of reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries” (Wenger, 1998, p. 158). In his model, this nexus of multi-membership and multiple learning trajectories overlap and inform each other, either reinforcing or repelling one another. In the same way, Wenger writes that learners may have to reconcile

conflicting forms of identity and competence as they are defined in different COPs (p. 160). Reconciliation work is essential to allowing multiple forms of membership to exist, and this is often accomplished through social practice (i.e., participation or non-participation), either in line with or in tension with an individual's multiple identities (p. 161).

In a study with adult Cambodian women in an English-language class in the United States, Skilton-Sylvester (2002) found that an "...understanding of a woman's domestic and professional identities [was] necessary to explain her investment in particular [English as a Second Language] ESL programs" (p. 24). It was determined that the identity-laden trajectories of access to outside COPs impacted students' motivation and capacity to learn in the classroom setting.

Patterns of Participation and Non-Participation

"Identities are produced through the practices we engage in and through practices we do not engage in" (Wenger, 1998, p. 164), and what we are not can have a large impact on how we define ourselves. Morita (2004) argues that nonparticipation is indicative of both identity and of agency; choosing not to engage is an act of agency. Participation and nonparticipation reflect processes of identity negotiation in relation to others; they are emblematic of the connections and the relatedness we have with others in and between COPs.

Two types of participation within COPs define an individual's level of legitimacy in relation to its other members: marginality and peripherality. Wenger (1998) defines marginality as a form of nonparticipation that prevents movement toward full membership. Marginality implies a lack of agency and barriers to desired forms of identity. Wenger defines peripherality as a positive form of membership that enables learning and puts the individual on an inbound trajectory.

Limited Access to LPP within COPs

Norton (2001) describes the cases of two ELL women, both professionals in their home countries, enrolling in professional computer classes to help them enter the Canadian workforce. Their instructor referred to them simply as “immigrant” and did not provide opportunities for them to participate in classroom activities with other native speakers in the class. One woman quit the class, angry that her identity as an adult professional was not acknowledged by this new COP; the other woman continued with the class, though she expressed frustration at the overt attempts to marginalize her from the other class members. The former student reacted to marginalization with resistance and non-participation, stymying her professional learning trajectory; the latter exhibited a stronger investment in her imagined community and persisted, eventually completing the course and securing employment in her professional field.

Similar situations of marginalization exist in public school and higher educational contexts, each challenging the imagined identities of its students and limiting access to their imagined COPs. In one particularly salient example of limited COP access for ELL students over the course of a school year, Toohey (1998) observed one public school kindergarten class where the resources and identities available to the two ELLs appeared to have been distributed in such a way as to limit their interactions with native speakers, to establish their identities within the school as delinquents with behavioral problems, and to label them as deficient both in language and cognitive abilities. The two learners were seated at individual desks that touched the teacher’s desk in the front of the room while the other children sat at tables spread out in the rest of the classroom. Their speech and behavior were regulated by the teacher to limit free interactions with peers, something the rest of the class was encouraged to engage in during group work and while they worked at learning stations. The teacher also had instituted an English-only

policy in the classroom, further limiting the students' opportunities to talk even to each other. Additionally, the class itself was designated for behaviorally challenging students, a characteristic that did not describe either of these two learners well. The two language learners were positioned in ways that directly prevented their movement toward fuller participation into a learning COP. Although this example concerns young children, the same scenario, though not often as explicitly marginalizing, persists in professional and educational institutions, like the computer class described above (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

As demonstrated in the above studies, limited opportunities with experts, or teachers in the public-school context, can have potentially damaging impacts on ELLs' self-efficacy (Ajayi, 2006; Verplaetse, 1998). Student-teacher relations, particularly teachers' interest in students and students' perception of those relations, have the capacity to greatly impact student success in English-only school cultures. Verplaetse (1998) found that most instructors limited the amount of verbal interactions they had with ELLs, severely impacting student-teacher relationships. Additionally, Ajayi (2006) discovered through student questionnaires and essays that teachers often assumed ELLs had lower cognitive abilities than their English-speaking peers and often misdiagnosed language learners as learning disabled. Teachers' misconceptions about their students' abilities inevitably shapes their self-esteem as learners. In Ajayi's 2006 study, students reported feeling mocked by their teachers for their lack of English skills and felt undervalued because they could not speak as fluently as other students. In the same study, Ajayi went on to hypothesize that the learning deficits assigned to students by their content subject teachers "have serious impacts in shaping their attitudes to language learning and consequently their achievements" (p. 474).

Similar processes of social stratification based on perceived linguistic biases have been documented in Britain, and these processes appear to socialize the least privileged children into more impoverished and marginalized communities than their English-speaking peers (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Children who identified more closely with the dominant cultural community (i.e., English-speaking with higher socioeconomic backgrounds) had a more “cosmopolitan vision of their country” (p. 247) and of their imagined place in it. Kanno and Norton found that developing social ties to ethnic communities was discouraged, because these communities were seen as impediments to minority students’ socialization into the imagined monolingual British community; thus, learners were encouraged to reject their own non-native English-speaking communities in their quest for access to English-speaking British COPs. The authors argued that ELL “identities must be understood not only in terms of our investment in the ‘real’ world but also in terms of our investment in possible worlds” (p. 248). In these contexts, ELLs are potentially marginalized from their own non-native language groups and also simultaneously from the monolingual British groups to which they may aspire to belong. In terms of COP membership, this scenario leaves many learners both linguistically and socially homeless.

A similar sense of social homelessness occurs in graduate Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs where international non-native English-speaking students work to gain access to scholarly COPs that regularly discriminate against them because of their non-nativeness. Samimy, et al. (2011) notes that many TESOL-focused publishers will label submitted articles as “NS” or “NNS” to stand for “native speaker” or “non-native speaker” judging non-native English writers more harshly than their native speaking counterparts. Some of the students had internalized the image of non-native speakers as deficient and had consequently limited their capacity to pursue fuller participation in scholarly COPs. In one study,

though, he followed a group of non-native graduate students as they worked to gain access to scholarly TESOL COPs. Several recommendations for inclusive pedagogy arose from the study. Students and teachers recognized the need for a non-native speaker forum where they could co-create their own communities and identities as scholars; they required more mentoring by old-timers in empowering positions; and they also emphasized the need for an explicit ownership of their own World Englishes (p. 561).

These examples illustrate the strong connections between patterns of participation and non-participation in COPs and identity negotiation. Focused inquiry targeted toward exploring how ELLs' interactions with and between their COPs impact their investment in themselves as learners could provide insights into what kinds of interactions and supports aid ELLs in their trajectories as legitimate members of COPs.

Examples of social displacement are readily handy in the literature on English learners, though Norton (2013) writes that “second language theorists have not adequately explored how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities second language learners have to practice the target language outside of the classroom” (p. 45). In a 2001 study, Norton found that all learners in one adult ELL classroom setting expressed that they felt uncomfortable speaking outside of the English language classroom, that the classroom context did not equate to the everyday or professional COPs in which they were expected to interact (2001). The English-language skills in one educational COP did not equate to access to participation in others.

The burden of communication often falls entirely on ELLs with little support from English-language experts in social and professional COPs, and Norton found that English-language old-timers or experts were often impatient with ELL newcomers (2001, p. 169). Many theoretical accounts assume that expert members assist newcomers, but studies have

demonstrated that experts often withhold assistance, creating barriers to learning and socialization within COPs; evidence suggests that this legitimacy is difficult for language learners to achieve through the eyes of native English speakers who may not have the patience or the inclination to work through linguistic barriers in order to participate collaboratively within a COP (Hougaard, 2009; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Morita, 2004; Norton, 2001).

In these examples, it is not only English language which precludes participation, but also the power dynamics evident in how these situations are structured to stymie the progress of specific groups whose contributions to their respective communities are not recognized by its other members. Wenger (1998) writes, "...what our communities pay attention to reifies us as participants...being treated the way they are treated, forming the community they form..." (pp. 150–151). As ELLs are systematically denied entrance into supportive COPs where they can learn and participate in "legitimate language" (Bourdieu, 1977), the structural boundaries put in place by community members who are unwilling or unable to participate with ELLs in support of their learning trajectories otherize and reify ELLs' positions as others, negating their potential to be heard and halting their capacity to contribute to their communities of practice.

Examples of Inclusive COPs for ELLs

An inclusive K-12 English language program. In educational settings, critical ESL pedagogy should challenge the cultural and linguistic dominance of the majority culture and empower ELLs with the agency to interact in their desired communities while still maintaining their unique identities. However, ELLs in particular face a daunting task in challenging the hegemonic status quo. Before they can dismantle it, they must first be able to understand exactly what the status quo is, which is no easy feat considering it is communicated in a language and through cultural norms and expectations that may be foreign to them. Little research exists that

highlights instances where ELLs locate spaces that allow for this kind of essential learning. Within an often culturally restrictive climate, examples of progressive models of critical language instruction are overshadowed by the predominance of traditional and isolating English-only approaches (Miller, et al., 2009; Norton, 2001; Valdes, 2001). However, the models that do exist can provide insights into how critical pedagogy can realistically occur, even in the face of linguistic barriers to communication.

Jim Cummins (2000), discussing a model of inclusive pedagogy in the Oyster-Adams Bilingual School in Washington, D.C., found that “micro-interactions between teachers and students in bilingual schools ‘refuse’ the discourse of subordination that characterizes the wider society and most conventional school contexts”. He found that most discourse in those schools reflected “an ideological assumption that linguistic and cultural diversity is a resource to be developed by all students, and not a problem that minority students must overcome in order to participate and achieve at school” (Cummins, 2000, p. 239).

This particular school requires all students to become bilingual in English and Spanish, shifting the balance of English dominance and changing the way students are socialized into the mainstream. In this model, the English hegemony is questioned in the school setting, and non-native-English-speaking students are not defined by their language “deficiencies,” but rather valued as contributors to a culturally and linguistically inclusive environment with assessment measures that reflect their experiences and language assets. The school’s curriculum beginning in pre-kindergarten emphasizes a valuing of diverse cultural identities not always available in mainstream contexts (Cummins, 2000, p. 221). An example like this provides proof that space can exist where ELLs’ linguistic, cultural, and other many contributions may be treated with

equal value within a learning community, hence allowing for opportunities for ELLs to thrive in ways that do not negate their own identities.

Inclusive COPs for adult ELLs. There exist few studies that show examples of how ELLs can reconstitute their identities within COPs to emphasize their unique contributions. For one student in the Samimy, et al. (2011) graduate TESOL program study, her admiration of a non-native speaking TESOL professor who taught using her own version of global English helped her access LPP within the scholarly field of SLA. The professor she admired had tied her self-image to an identity that was inclusive of her international English; she had gained access to academic TESOL COPs through self-legitimization and through a renewed emphasis on communicating the value of her perspectives in her scholarly COPs. Her imagined identity was based on an expanded vision of the English speech COP, and she reconceptualized her non-native speaker identity as “multi-competent and not as deficient” (p. 571).

However, as Samimy, et al. points out, she may not have been able to build this strong self-image without a “safe space” that broke down patterns of oppression and marginalization and permitted her to engage in constructive discourse (2011, p. 572). Through a safe structure that included mentorship from an expert scholar, opportunities to co-conduct and co-present on research, and regular non-native-speaker support meetings, she was thus able to negotiate her own identity as part of her trajectory toward fuller participation in a desired COP, or what we could also term her “imaginary community of practice” (Norton 2001, 2013).

Reflecting a less formalized version of COPs, Black (2005) studied online fan fiction communities for one year, examining how language proficiency influenced participation. Fan fictions, according to Black, are original works of fiction based on popular television, books, video games, and movies where authors use the works’ original characters and worlds and then

expand on the stories based on what they imagine happens beyond the written text. He utilized LPP as a way to gauge genre-based writing progress in non-native speaking authors. What he observed in this study was that newcomers and old-timers had specific roles that highlighted their strengths rather than focused on their deficits in linguistic or writing skills. For example, Black saw that newcomers often acted as reviewers who were given opportunities to display sophisticated genre knowledge and offer meaningful critiques. For learners who were uncomfortable writing their own fan fiction in English, they could still establish a valuable social base within the fan fiction COP (p. 122). They established themselves as legitimate readers and reviewers and ensured acceptance into the community. The emphasis on a shared interest (i.e., reading and writing fan fiction) served as a vehicle for native-non-native-speaker interactions that are largely missing in schools, workplaces, and society in general. Much like Norton's (2001, 2013) imagined communities that are situated across space and time, online communities have the potential to transcend geographic barriers and allow for an expansion of identities that are not tied to concrete everyday reality (Samimy, et al., 2011).

Recommendations for Inclusive Participation

Lave and Wenger (1991) write that “the concept of legitimate peripheral participation provides a framework for bringing together theories of situated activities and theories about the production and reproduction of the social order” (p. 47). Within the contexts of language learning, the social order in any situated learning environment will be challenged. Language is the fundamental ingredient for most communication and social interaction; challenging its stability within a community can be perceived as a threat to the stability of a community as a whole. Using LPP as a framework for examining sociocultural language learning analysis in conjunction with Norton's (1995, 2001, 2013) concepts of imagined communities could provide

a vehicle for the development of strategies to reframe the discourse of COPs to expand their constructed identities to permit ELLs to become valued participants of more inclusive communities. This, in essence, would lead to a changing conception of what a COP entails for language learners in native-language-speaker contexts; rather than being composed of a rigid set of knowledge, skills, and expected behaviors, a COP could focus more on permeability and a shared incorporation of diverse ideas.

Wenger (1998) writes that a focus on participation as a way to understand and support learning has different implications for individuals and for communities. For individuals, he claims it means that learning becomes “an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices in their communities;” and for communities, it means “refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members” (p. 7). Participation is a necessary component of learning, especially for communicative competence in a language. As the foreign-born population increases in the United States to approach majority-minority status (Migration Policy Institute, 2016), COPs must refine their practices to incorporate increasingly diverse modes of communication and modes of participation.

If the fan fiction and TESOL graduate program examples serve as case studies, a good model for language learning may be one rooted in supportive practices that ensure COP entrance by focusing on participants’ strengths and unique contributions rather than on what they have yet to learn. These communities thrived by redirecting identity negotiation as part of a COP away from language difference and towards mutual learning based on a shared interest. Language difference was reconfigured as either an asset to be celebrated or as a tangential issue with the COPs’ focus instead on content and creation. Models of learning that adjust their strategies for

participation may prove to be more successful in increasing linguistic and social participation than our current linguistic-driven and deficiency-based methods.

Research has shown that when school environments are perceived as supportive to minority students' home experiences, academic engagement increases (Tatum, 2004), as does student confidence (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003). However, as is currently the situation in most public-school systems and many other communities, ELLs are not easily incorporated into social, professional, or academic COPs. "Gaining legitimacy may be so difficult that some fail to learn until considerable time has passed" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 76). Resistance to ELL populations is still prevalent in many communities (Krogstad, 2015) and can result in non-participation and even the formation of counter cultures (Miller, et al., 2009).

However, examples exist to show us that legitimate participation of learners from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds is tenable within a single COP (Black, 2005; Cummins, 2000; Samimy, 2011). Acknowledging the importance of the many COPs involved in language learning would be an important step in legitimizing sociocultural approaches to learning and refocusing programmatic and curricular efforts to increase awareness of ELLs' multi-competent identities to change instructional goals from those of wanting to alter ELLs to fit into dominant paradigmatic preferences to those of altering the general discourse to become more expansive and inclusive of non-dominant experiences and knowledge.

Methods for Examining Language-focused COPs for Adult ELLs

In the field of SLA, linguists have begun to explore how COPs interact with language acquisition, though socially-situated linguistic studies remain scarce. Hougaard (2009) in particular argues for the inclusion of Lave and Wenger's 1991 conception of LPP as a way to

legitimize conversation analysis, a popular qualitative method in socially interactive SLA research, and tie it more directly to issues of power, agency, and access. SLA research's incorporation of the COP and LPP frameworks is scant; however, examples of research exist to show how issues of identity and access to participation in COPs can be studied in the context of English language acquisition. What follows is a brief summary of the methods used for five studies with adult-aged ELL groups and a discussion of their relevance and applicability for the purposes of this research.

Norton's 1995 study, on which much of her later work is based, focuses on issues of identity negotiation in ELL women after they had completed a year in an ESL program. Her conceptual framework was built on the understanding that access to practice in the target language is critical to acquisition, but she challenges the assumption that ELLs have ready access to practice target language speakers. Her study included a small sample size ($N = 5$) and employed a range of methods to examine issues of identity negotiation over a full year: self-report diaries, questionnaires at the beginning and ends of the studies, individual and group interviews, and home visits. She cites participant diaries as the major source of real-time data on identity negotiation processes. Her study revealed the temporal and tense nature of socially situated identities and how issues of power in a learning environment impacted learners' investment in language learning and consequently their motivation to persist over time. Norton's rigorous approach to this research enabled her to collect a large amount of rich data through these critical case studies over the course of a full year, and her findings have great implications for SLA and the field's conceptions of the relationship between motivation and investment in identity.

Mobido and Mobido (1995) focused their study on thirty-five ELL women, all immigrants who were experiencing barriers to participation in their local labor unions. The study was motivated by labor data in Canada that showed immigrant women to be disproportionately represented in what they term the “secondary labor market” (p. 83) with low wages and high turn-over rates and little representation in their labor unions. Through interviews over a nine-month period, the researchers found that the women perceived several significant social barriers to participation, including domestic expectations that these women both work outside of the home and take full responsibility for running their households. Two major themes that emerged across the thirty-five participants included racism and gender bias, particularly the “double day of labor” (p. 86) experienced by immigrant women. The primary finding for this study is that, despite efforts to increase language skills through workplace ESL programs, low levels of English only constitute a small proportion of the obstacles women face in participating in these particular COPs. While the description of methodology for this study is thin, and it is more than twenty years old, the concepts that guided the research and the direction of the findings continue to resound in newer studies (Morita, 2004; Samimy, 2001; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002), implying that language skill is only a fraction of what allows for legitimate access to COPs. However, an assumption that guided this work is that women desired equal participation in their local unions. The study did not, however, describe what made the immigrant experiences captured in the data substantially different from those of native-born workers in similar situations. Issues of immigrant identity – and not solely of worker and mother identity – do not appear to be directly figured into the analysis.

Samimy, et al. (2001) focused their study on a scholarly community of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) master’s level international students and their efforts

to gain access to scholarly TESOL COPs. With a critical case sample of three, they used a participative inquiry method in which all participants engaged as co-researchers and co-subjects and worked together to develop an emergent process of collaboration and dialogue. The study spanned three and a half years, and all participants acted as co-authors of the study. In this example, the study also acted as an intervention, influencing how ELL graduate students were able to self-identify within this community. While the proposed research here is not with a single, coherent COP, this study demonstrates the potential for participation in a research project to act as an intervention, an important consideration for the methodology of this work.

Using Norton's concepts of identity negotiation, and arguing for an increased focus in SLA on ELLs' adult identities and their investment in learning, Skilton-Sylvester (2002) investigated motivation for learning English in four Cambodian ELL women. The ethnographic methods she employed in these four case studies included four months of participant observation in two classrooms, interviews with each of the learners, and year-long tutoring sessions and informal discussions with the women to gauge their language-learning experiences over time. She also interviewed the English teachers and program administrators at the adult education school where the women were taking their classes. The data were analyzed for themes focusing on their participation in their communities outside of class. She found that the women's outside roles as mothers, spouses, siblings, and workers (only one of the four women worked at the start of the study) were central to their participation in the ESL class. She also found that the women's cultural heritages played important parts in their identities as English learners, both in encouraging and discouraging persistence over time. Skilton-Sylvester analyzed the data by role, focusing on how each one contributed to learning investment in the classroom. This study focuses both on a formal learning environment (i.e., the ESL classroom) and women's

experiences outside of it. Her implications for pedagogical practice include a call for awareness of the lived experiences of immigrant women – and not only generalizations about roles – to be central to curriculum development. Though a small sample, her ethnographic methods – observations, interviews, and long-term engagement – contribute to the collection of rich data on the perceptions of these women, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Focusing on ELL identity negotiation in mainstream undergraduate content-area classes, Morita's 2004 study employed a multiple case study approach to examine the shifting identities of six Japanese ELLs in a North American university. The study also included the perspectives of ten instructors who worked with the students. The study found that the students had difficulties overcoming "ascribed identities" (p. 598) especially when imposed on them by instructors. The study employed students' self-reports, interviews, and classroom observations over the course of one academic year. For self-reports, the researcher gave each of the students an audio recorder to record their reflections. The students also provided data through email, face-to-face interviews, and telephone communication, as well as through three formal interviews. Weekly classroom observations, for a total of 151 hours of observations, and interviews with course instructors also contributed to the collection of data. The rigor and longitudinal nature of this study provides insights into the processes of identity negotiation within a single setting, the content-area university classroom, and, while observations of a fixed site are not tenable for this proposed study of adults who are not connected by a common COP, the use of interviews and regular self-reports provides a model of an effective method for collecting data on shifting identities for ELLs in a mainstream environment.

Each of these studies used a critical case selection criteria for its samples and employed longitudinal ethnographic approaches to gather rich data. All of these studies used interviews as

a major means of data collection, and two used self-reports as a way to gather more information about real-time identity negotiation. For the purposes of this study and with the constraints presented by a sample population of working adults who are not participating together in one common COP, observations are untenable. The use of self-reports collected through flexible means like email, phone, or face-to-face interactions serves as a promising model to collect consistent, longitudinal data for adults who may have irregular and busy schedules and to capture changes in perceptions regarding questions of identity and access to COP membership.

Conclusions

Research on adult English language learners remains limited, and the research that does exist on their situational learning experiences is often confined to specific contexts that do not take into account the full spectrum of the learners' social structures and everyday formal and informal interactions, factors that greatly contribute to their ability to learn and progress. Norton's 1995 study and Mobido and Mobido's 1995 research direct the focus to ELLs' full lived experiences, and what this study aims to do is expand this understanding by examining critical cases where learners perceive they have gained access to desired COPs that include native-born English speakers. By shifting the focus to instances of perceived access rather than perceived exclusion, it is hoped that pedagogical practices can be aligned to strengthen and recreate experiences of legitimate access and active participation in ELLs' desired COPs.

Norton argues that "second language acquisition theory needs to develop a conception of identity that is understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable, social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction" (2001, p. 45). This process of identity negotiation needs to inform scholarly research on adult ELLs, as well as programmatic and curricular design for adult English language programs. COPs are ubiquitous, existing outside of

the institutions that have constituted the focal points for ELL research: public schools, universities, workplaces, professional learning classes, adult education classes, etc. The institutions studied in the literature contain ELLs within them, but these institutions may not be what English learners perceive as their primary communities of practice. What is missing is a discussion of what constitutes COPs for ELL groups from the perspectives of the learners themselves.

Wenger (1998) writes, “participation...refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities” (p. 4). The literature abounds with examples of barriers to ELLs’ inclusion in COPs where they can grow not only in language, academic, or professional skill but also as people engaged in the identity-shifting process of learning in conjunction with others. Research into what ELLs consider to be their COPs, how they gain access to them, how their participation changes over time, and how that participation impacts identity negotiation would be useful work for educators, trainers, and professionals who work with English learners to better align curricular content and pedagogical practices to those of ELLs’ many COPs. This alignment could shift institutional focus away from a model based on perceived language deficit and toward a model built on the strengths that ELLs bring with them, not only from their home countries, but also from the varied experiences they have as they navigate their identities in new COPs.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines a description of the research methodologies chosen to answer the study's research questions, including rationales for the choices that drove the design. I begin with

an explanation of my position as researcher and its potential impacts on data collection and analysis. Based on the situational and temporal nature of the phenomenon under study, I then defend the choice of a qualitative multiple case study approach within a constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm. Next, I outline my methods of data collection aligned to my chosen paradigm and research questions, my criteria and methods for participant recruitment and selection, and the proposed data analysis methods, drawing both from phenomenology and grounded theory, ending with a discussion of the strategies I used to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity as a researcher.

My experiences as both language learner and language instructor in domestic and foreign situations shaped my rationale for exploring the adult ELL context. However, I would be remiss if I did not express my own frustrations with current trends in political attitudes toward immigrant and refugee populations and persistent trends of educational and professional isolation for non-majority cultural groups. In my fifteen years of working with ELLs in the United States, I have witnessed and continue to witness unnecessary barriers to participation in mainstream educational and workplace opportunities based on misinformed assumptions. In my experiences, and in reflection of public opinion discussed in the first chapter, there continues to prevail in many places a disregard for children and adults who do not speak English fluently or who do not conform to mainstream cultural norms.

In this study, I hoped to accomplish two major goals: the first was to learn more about what works well when learners gain access to their desired mainstream communities and are accepted as legitimate members; the other goal was to explicitly focus on instances of integration rather than isolation, something that is rare in ELL research. As we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, this proved difficult to accomplish as so many of the instances of social or professional inclusion

that the participating adults discussed were tarnished by what they expressed was a lack of perceived legitimacy within their respective communities. Rarely did they feel accepted as legitimate members of a community.

An additional important concern related to positionality in this research is my status as a white native English-speaking female, a member of the mainstream culture. The research was designed in a way to lessen the impacts of this positionality and to empower the ELLs who participated as equal partners in the co-construction of the emergent design of the study. While it is my lens and agenda that shaped the initial foreshadowed questions, it was the content and the recommendations from the participants themselves that shaped the emerging process and the final products of the inquiry.

Research Paradigm

The study focused on the process of identity negotiation within COPs, a phenomenon that involves understanding experiences of membership and participation from the perspectives of the individuals themselves within their specific and changing contexts. In contrast to much of the positivist and post-positivist modes of inquiry in research with language learners that begin with pre-set variables and hypotheses about what would happen, this study aimed to understand a process about which little research has been conducted. While the initial research design was informed by a theoretical framework, there were no set variables or preconceived expectations about the data that might emerge. To develop an understanding of this phenomenon from the experiences and perspectives of the participants themselves, the study employed a qualitative constructivist and interpretivist research approach (Rodwell, 1998).

The overarching question of the study was, how do adult ELLs negotiate identities within and between their COPs? A constructivist research design assumes the central importance of

context to meaning-making (Rodwell, 1998, p. 33) and allows for an understanding of how individuals “actively create, modify, and interpret the world in which they live” (p. 17). Constructivist research methods stem from an understanding of the temporal and situational natures of reality, an understanding of the subjectivities inherent in face to face social interactions, and an emphasis on the use of narrative through language to express those fluctuating realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Constructive research also calls for the adoption of an interpretivist paradigm where participants’ values and intersubjective meanings are important aspects of the research (Rowell, 1998, p. 33). Davis (1995) writes that in language acquisition research, it is only by focusing on participants’ own points of view and perceptions of their expressed realities that the nature of the social influences on language and identity can be understood (p. 432). She advocates for an interpretivist approach to language research that focuses on the construction and co-construction of meaning within unique sets of circumstances as a way to best understand the processes that impact identity and language-in-interaction. In other words, how does the interpersonal context of communication impact how one is positioned, how one sees oneself, and what kinds of language are available for the ELL to use? The centrality of context and subjective meaning-making in constructivist and interpretivist research makes this a particularly appropriate research paradigm for examining this phenomenon.

Research Design

The aim of this study was to develop a body of knowledge that is particular to the participants in the inquiry - adult ELLs - who remain a relatively unstudied group. The aim was not to generalize about the group of adult ELLs but rather to develop portraits of identity negotiation processes within the specific circumstances of the unique participants of this research. A multiple case study design allowed for the production of context-dependent

knowledge through repeated one-on-one interactions with the participants over time (Flyvberg, 2006).

The majority of studies on this population highlight means of social, professional, and civic exclusion. In contrast, this study aims to give voice to what Watson-Gegeo describes as “formerly silenced voices” (2004, p. 331) and identify cases where participants self-identify as having achieved what Lave and Wenger (1991) would call legitimate membership or inclusion in a desired COP. By focusing on processes of inclusion rather than exclusion, themes could emerge that pointed to potential patterns of participation that may be transferrable to other adult ELLs through instructional and program design, as well as through policies that impact educational program structures and resources.

Morita (2004) in her study on ELLs in mainstream university courses, advocated for process-oriented approaches to second language research that investigate the socially and temporally situated circumstances in which learners negotiate their participation and identities. Rodwell (1998) writes that constructivist research “emphasize[s] cognitive structures, or schemas, such as organizing principles, deep structures, and interactive feedback from the environment” (p. 20). The processes through which these underlying structures impact ELLs’ identities are what this study sought to explore, and this could only be done through methods that focus on participants’ real-time perspectives of their experiences.

In order to understand more about how intersubjective processes of communication (e.g., attitudes, perceptions, power positions) impact identity negotiation in language learners, it was imperative to design a study that would allow for an examination of what Kubchandani (1997) calls the “spatial orientation” of language use. This research sought to begin to develop understandings of how symbolic systems (e.g., hierarchical structures and cultural attitudes) in

specific communities interact with systems of communication, participation, and identity negotiation. Observations of adult ELLs in their many disparate contexts was not a feasible option for this study, so, in order to understand how context-specific systems interact without the benefit of long-term observations in situ, the research approach allowed for repeated opportunities for the participants to reflect and re-reflect on their processes of identity negotiation within these systems.

Rodwell (1998) writes that constructivist research design involves “giving the most possible structure to an emerging process and product that is actually without predictable structure” (p. 51). In this section I outline the a priori structure of the research methodology, noting that the structure shifted as new themes emerged. Going into the work, I made the assumption that the “...human instrument is the primary data gathering instrument” (p. 57) and focused my design there, allowing for additional sources of data to emerge as warranted.

Following the study’s focus on ELLs’ perceptions of their identities within COPs and the temporal nature of those identity positions (Morita, 2004; Norton, 2011), the design of the study allowed for data collection consistently over the course of at least three months. Figure 2 below shows the overall a priori structure of the study. Three interviews lasting thirty to sixty minutes each, spaced apart by six weeks, weekly participant self-reports, mid-way and final member-checks with all participants, and reflexive researcher field notes comprised the data for the study.

Research Design: Multiple Case Study

Timeframe: ~ 3 months: > 3 interviews spaced six weeks apart

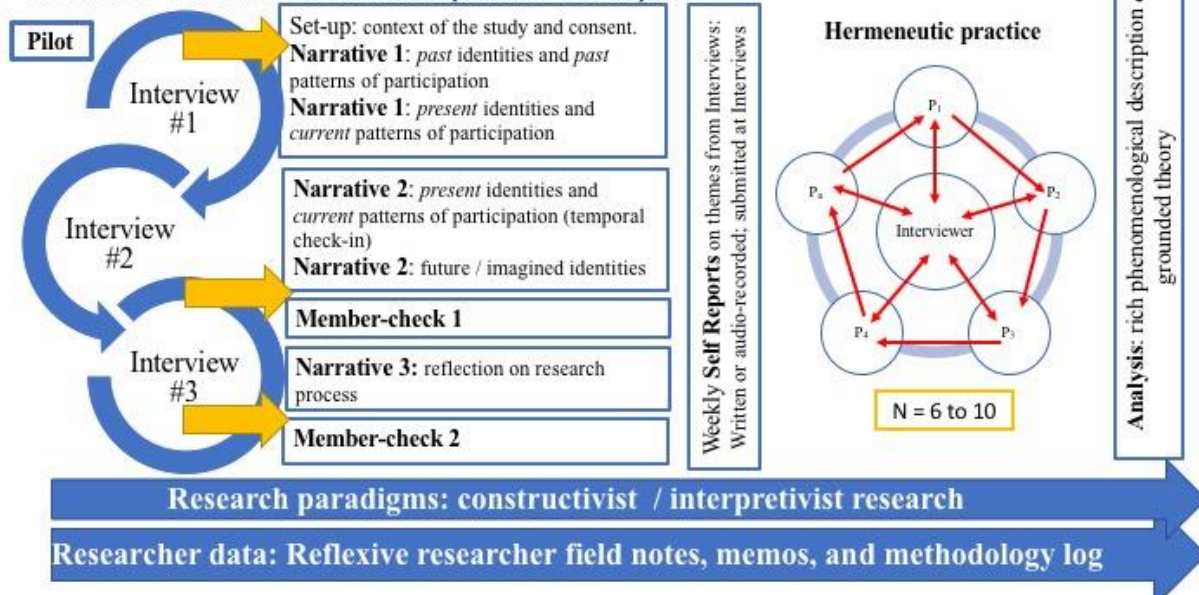


Figure 2. Methods for data collection and analysis

Interviews and participant self-reports. It was vital that the data collected in this research reflected to the most extent possible the true experiences of the participants themselves. Narrative inquiry is a particularly salient method for exploring the “life experiences as narrated by those who live them” (Chase, 2011, p. 421). The focus of the study design was on participants’ narration of their experiences and how their identities were negotiated within the constructs of their communities and interactions. Narratives by their nature are interpretive and present the subjective experiences of the participant. Narrative inquiry, including possible inclusion of large sections of participants’ narratives into the research report, allows for a participant-specific accounting of experience, rather than a presentation of common tendencies that may not effectively attend to the unique attitudinal, emotional, historical, cultural, or situational contexts of the narrator.

An initial interview with participants set the context of the study, serving to establish rapport, the purpose of the research, and the expectations of participation. Here, too, I emphasized the participant's right to withdraw at any time without penalty and their right to refuse to answer any questions, as well as covering issues of confidentiality. See Appendix D for the information form. Participants chose a pseudonym for use in all written transcripts, field notes, and drafts of the study. The initial plan for the narrative of the first interview was to focus on participants' past and current identity perceptions, basing the discussion on concepts of COPs and identity negotiation derived from the literature. See Appendix E for the interview protocol. The interviews occurred at locations convenient to the participants: two chose to meet with me in a closed room in my office building, which was close to their homes; three chose to meet in a study room at a local library close to their residences; one preferred a local coffee shop; and another asked me to come to her residence for the interviews.

To capture the temporal nature of identity negotiation, participants were asked to audio record - or to write in a journal - self-reports based on the discussions of the interviews. I provided participants with small audio recorders and journals to record their reflections in the manner of their choice. With the participants' permission, I texted them a weekly reminder to record or write a reflection. I prompted them to reflect on themes related to participation within communities – their own or others' patterns of participation that they witnessed; they were also encouraged to record their feelings about any interactions they had with native speakers. As this was an emergent design, the content of the recordings stemmed from the conversations in the interviews and participants' own interpretations of those discussions. Participants were encouraged to record anything they thought was important or meaningful and were not limited to the pre-identified topics from the interviews. Recordings were collected at the second and third

interview meetings. The audio-recorders were equipped with USB ports for data transfer, and I transferred their audio files onto my laptop at each meeting. Over the course of the study, the participants submitted a total of 38 audio-recorded reflections and four short handwritten reflections.

The second interview occurred after a period of five to six weeks and consisted of a discussion and member-check of the initial findings from the first round of interviews with all participants, asking participants for their reactions to the findings and incorporating that feedback into the analysis. Depending on participants' preferences, they either read the findings or we reviewed them orally together. The content of this interview then focused on participant narratives about their current and future or imagined identity positions. Initial questions focused on patterns of participation in current COPs and what kinds of positions they would like to hold in their future communities. This second meeting also served as an opportunity to receive the first round of participant self-reports, and we discussed participants' reactions to this part of process and how it may have impacted the way they think about their daily interactions with English speakers.

A third and final interview commenced similarly to the second and focused on exploring participants' reactions to the findings of the study so far, based on the first two interview cycles, the first set of self-reflections from all participants, and their own continued reflections on the themes of the study. This session served as a comprehensive member-check, and participants' reactions to the findings constituted important additional data. In addition to discussing responses to the findings, we discussed participants' reflections on the research process itself, including any potential changes in the way the process had inspired a new way of thinking about themselves in interactions with others.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim; participants' audio-recorded self-reports were also transcribed verbatim for analysis. The overall structure of three interviews yielded ample data to address the three primary concepts that drove this research design: COPs, identities, and patterns of participation. Additionally, the timeline allowed for an accounting of variation in identity positions over time without drawing out the research process to a length of time that may not have been feasible for adults to complete. Three of the initial eight participants could not complete the study because of personal circumstances; however, their contributions in the first and second interviews yielded important information and valuable contributions to the study.

Hermeneutic practice. As a central component of the data collection, this study used hermeneutic practice as a means to co-construct the research content and design with participants (Rodwell, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1994) contend that “individual constructions can be refined only through interactions between and among investigator and respondent” and that hermeneutic techniques allow for varying constructions to be “compared and contrasted through a dialectical interchange” (p. 111). In this iterative cycle of data collection, all participants acted as part of an asynchronous circle of sharing in which themes and ideas from one set of interviews or reflections informed the questions and probes in subsequent interviews. Ideas elicited from participants, in an anonymous manner, were presented to other participants as ideas to be considered, accepted, rejected, adapted, or understood as either a part of their own experiences or as a part of another's experiences. In a cycle of co-construction, participants informed the process of inquiry and data analysis. This happened during and between each interview cycle, allowing for participants to be co-constructors of the data collection process.

During the member checks, participants generally agreed with the identified themes, and they elaborated on and personified them with their own experiences and interpretations. They also, on occasion, contradicted some of the themes brought up by other participants. For example, in the second round of interviews, I mentioned to Jawad that many of the other adults in the study felt that English speakers had very little patience to listen to them during their spoken communications. Jawad responded that, no, he had not met with impatience but rather a complete lack of engagement from English speakers. Rather than impatience he identified a pattern of avoidance and dismissal, and he complained of a lack of opportunity to even engage in conversation, describing himself in these instances as a perceived “stranger” or “foreigner.” Jawad’s response redirected subsequent interview conversations, and we were able to elaborate on the varying degrees of perceived dismissal and additional layers of marginalizing behaviors in their interactions with English speakers that often left them feeling “strange,” a theme that had not yet arisen in the conversations.

Research relationship. The questions I asked the participants were often sensitive and personal in nature and required trust and a rapport between us. I worked to build this trust in several ways. During the first interviews, I began with an informal conversation about where they grew up, their families, hobbies, and anything else they felt like sharing. Throughout the study, I let them lead the discussion without changing their train of thought or infusing my own interpretations into what they were saying in that moment. I also shared my own personal stories as they related to what we were discussing, so they learned about my family and my background. This mutual sharing was an important aspect of the trust I was hoping to build and also an important facet of the legitimate participation I wanted to foster as co-participants in the study. Also, the length of the study allowed us to become closer and more connected. By the third

interview, conversation flowed more easily. Several of the participants sent me text messages in between interviews to share important things that had happened to them, and I would send them messages related to topics we had discussed at our meetings. For example, I sent David book recommendations, and I sent Maria information about an art gallery where she could take classes. I worked to establish a sense of trust and relationship that went beyond the study.

Pilot. The a priori interview questions were piloted with one work colleague and one acquaintance from my doctoral program who are both ELLs to gauge for clarity of meaning and for the amount of time each interview might take. The initial interview protocol was adapted based on their feedback. The process for recording and submitting self-reports was piloted, as well. I asked the pilot participants to make an audio recording based on the prompts from the pilot conversation and then discuss how they felt about the process of recording a self-reflection. Using the pilot responses and a longer recording of my own, I tested the process of transferring the audio files to my computer for both short and long recordings and ensured that the device that I decided to use worked for this purpose.

Field notes. Researcher field notes throughout the planning, collection, and analysis phases of the study comprised an important part of the data. Field notes included recognition and interpretations of tacit knowledge, intuition, and nonverbal communications and artifacts (Rodwell, 1998), as well as micro and macro factors such as relevant local and national events that had the potential to impact the processes we are attempting to explain (Watson-Gegeo, 1992, p. 54). I kept a journal documenting not only my interpretations of the research as it developed, but also my perceptions of positionality within the one-on-one researcher-participant COP.

The primary goal of data collection in the study was to communicate a sense of “polyvocality” (Finlay, 2002, p. 223) and to convey the perceptions and experiences of the

participants as authentically as possible. I incorporated a reflexive approach to data collection and analysis, working to ensure mutual collaboration with participants in both the content and means of data collection and worked individually and with participants toward transparency in modifying and challenging my interpretations of the data (Finlay, 2002).

Analytic memos. A particularly relevant and critical interactional component to recognize in this study was the existence of language difference. As will be discussed in the following section on case selection, participants with high levels of oral and aural communication skills in English were recruited to minimize issues of mutual comprehensibility. Mann (2011) writes about conducting research with language learners and argues for a more situational approach to data collection, including an awareness of when participants code-switch into their first or other languages and when understanding, either linguistically or culturally, seems uncertain. The research design proposed here aimed to mitigate potential misunderstandings through multiple member-checks and through an emphasis on participants' own self-reflections outside of the interview environment as a means of data collection. Analytic field notes were written during and immediately after interviews, as well as throughout the process of data analysis, and are organized chronologically, according to the interview cycle (i.e., first, second, and third rounds of interviews). This method of organizing the notes chronologically allowed for a clearer view of changing themes in my own researcher reflections as themes emerged, both in the data and in the research process.

Methodological log. I also maintained a methodological log, recording all activities, emerging areas of inquiry, and data analysis processes related to the study to chart the progress of the emergent design. The research study was conducted as proposed, though the initial proposed timeline of six weeks between each interview was not feasible with all participants as

one was leaving to visit their home country and one had to leave to work outside of the immediate area.

Case Selection

In order to explore the phenomenon of identity negotiation in mainstream English-dominant contexts, build on the scant literature on adult ELLs, and to ensure feasibility of this study, a small set of selection criteria was employed during initial recruitment, allowing for additional criteria to be set or an expansion of participation based on initial interview findings, as well as purposive sampling from participants. Little research exists on identity negotiation in the adult ELL population, and in most studies, justification for the choice of cases is either missing or is explained by convenience. It was, therefore, difficult to define in advance what a typical, critical, or extreme case might look like. In fact, Flyvberg (2006) posits that a case may be all three simultaneously. The participants in this study do not represent typical, critical, or extreme cases, but rather, their narratives fall along a continuum of these types of cases, together painting a partial picture of the adult ELL experience.

The initial criteria set down here stem from the themes presented in the theoretical framework (i.e., COPs, identity negotiation in mainstream English-dominant contexts, and patterns of participation in these contexts) as well as what may best enable participants to speak to those themes. Flyvberg (2006) labels these types of cases “paradigmatic cases” that can help establish criteria for future case selection in this area of study. He writes that “no standard exists for the paradigmatic case because it sets the standard” (p. 232).

However, in order to speak to the foundational themes of this study, several initial criteria were essential. A history of interaction with native English speakers, for example, was critical for speaking about themes of identity negotiation in English-dominant contexts. Adult age at the

time of arrival in the United States was also important in that it ensures that the discussions will be contained to the adult ELL context and not that of the K-12 system; however, one participant was chosen to participate who had relocated to this country as an undocumented minor at the age of fifteen. She participated in public high school, but during the recruitment process in an adult English-language class, she expressed both an interest in participating in order to “tell her story” and an eagerness to share her experiences as an adult ELL. Another criterion for inclusion was that they had engaged in English-language instruction after their arrival to the United States, ensuring that participants had a perceived need to learn more English language. Additionally, those who were relocated to the United States for their professions or who were admitted to an American institution of higher education were excluded from participation, primarily because their access to LPP in COPs is to some extent an expectation of their relocation.

During the development of this research design two additional criteria were added to aid in establishing relevance by limiting the breadth of experiences that may vary according to gender and ethnicity, especially regarding the adult ELL population. Foundational studies on identity negotiation in adult ELLs focus on women (Mobido & Mobido, 1995; Norton, 1995, 2001), and the intent was that this research would expand on that foundation. It is feared that without a larger number of both genders, the inclusion of a small number of men in this study would skew data analysis, making it difficult to detect themes in gender-based identity processes. However, initial recruitment yielded an equal number of men and women who wanted to participate. One of the men, in particular, expressed his view that this was “important work” and that he wanted “to have a voice.” I had originally thought, too, that women would be easier to talk to and would be more willing to disclose their stories than men; however, the men who participated in the study seemed just as eager to share their perspectives as the female

participants. Additionally, the gender-based selection criterion was discouraged during the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. During the entire data collection process, themes and patterns of participation and identity negotiation presented themselves similarly across genders, minimizing the apparent role of gender in patterns of inclusion.

Likewise, I worried that ethnicity and cultural background may present a similar dilemma in that the inclusion of one or two participants from a markedly different background than the rest of the sample would challenge the analysis of the data. Therefore, initial sampling strategies attempted to do one of two things: either sample all participants from a similar cultural background (e.g., Latina, Northern African, Middle Eastern) or sample participants evenly from a variety of cultural backgrounds so that one lone sample from a unique cultural background would not skew data analysis. This was accomplished during the recruitment process with a wide range in cultural and ethnic backgrounds in the sample, representing a multi-cultural cross-section of immigrant and refugee groups.

In summary, the criteria for inclusion in the study were

- an advanced or high-intermediate level of English oral and aural skills, as determined by either an English-language program assessment or by participant self-perception and evidenced by researcher-interviewer interaction;
 - self-perception of legitimate membership in an English-language-dominant COP;
 - participation in an English-language-dominant work environment;
 - past or current involvement, for however long or short of a duration, in an English-language-learning program either in the United States or in another Anglophone country;
- and

- a reason for relocating to the United States that does not involve a professionally sponsored relocation or a program of study in higher education.

There exist myriad other potential criteria that may impact identity negotiation in English-dominant COPs (e.g., age, first language, religion, educational background, refugee status, or immigration status); however, for the feasibility of the study, the above criteria were selected as an initial screening tool and were requirements for participation at the start of the study.

Recruitment. To identify advanced ELLs who have participated in English-dominant COPs, I worked with the head of a local refugee reestablishment organization that works with refugees after their initial benefits have run out, the manager of a local adult education organization with two large English-language programs, and the supervisor of a local community college that has a developmental English program. I have worked with all of these individuals on either a professional or volunteer basis, and they expressed an interest in the study and a willingness to assist with participant recruitment. See Appendix A for initial contact email to the instructors and the resettlement agency representative. In addition, to encourage retention of participants during the three-month schedule, an incentive in the form of three Visa gift cards totaling fifty dollars was offered upon completion of the third interview. Participants were also able to keep the audio recorders and journals for themselves after the study. Two commented that they planned to use the audio recorders to record lectures in upcoming classes, and one said she would use it to record her thoughts about a book she was planning to write about her experiences in the United States.

To ensure the ability to conduct the research using hermeneutic practice, a small group of six to eight participants was recruited to begin within a narrow timeframe. The research design

allowed for additional purposive sampling; however, this was not implemented during the study. Purposive sampling involves participant nominations of other individuals who may have similar, different, or important perspectives to add, and they are included to extend information based on emerging themes or to fill in information regarding divergent perspectives (Rodwell, 1998, pp. 67 – 68). While most participants discussed others' experiences as they related to their own, and some mentioned that they knew of others who would be interested in participating, the wide range and wealth of experiences in the recruited sample was more than sufficient to address the research questions.

Data Analysis

In the adoption of an interpretivist approach to research, it is important to note the cyclical process of data collection and analysis. This design did not assume a linear approach in which data was collected, analyzed, and then reported; it encouraged an iterative approach in which data collection and analysis were in interaction, each fueling the other. Three main approaches were employed in the analysis of data as it emerged: reflexivity, phenomenological description, and grounded theory.

Reflexivity. Throughout the planning and implementation process of data collection and analysis, I maintained a journal of researcher memos to document personal experiences, perceptions, expectations, conflicts, positions, and interests that were relevant to the research. These memos were incorporated into the analysis and writing of the findings in an effort to make my own involvement in the construction of the data and the meanings of the research explicit and public (Finlay, 2002). I returned to my position as researcher and as a person-in-interaction throughout the process of analysis. Field notes and memos were incorporated into the analyses to explore researcher-participant relationships and to maintain transparency in reporting

methodological process. Especially as this study involved questions of identity negotiation processes, turning the lens on my own process as a researcher and on the interactions that characterized the small researcher-participant COP that comprised this study was of even greater importance.

Phenomenological writing and intersubjectivity. The rationale for using phenomenological writing in this study was to focus on the intersubjective nature of the research experience as an essential part of the data. At the simplest level, phenomenology is interested in the study of phenomena. In this instance, the phenomenon is the research process itself and not the focus of inquiry. Phenomenological writing involves an attempt to acknowledge all of the intertwining, conflicting, melding, rising, receding, intersubjective and subject-object factors that comprise a moment; it seeks to get to the essence of a moment or phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). This process requires positional reflexivity and an interrogation into processes, including those in the research design, that may work to maintain hegemonic relations that would otherwise go unnoticed in the research process (p. 69). Vagle adapts van Manen's lived experience protocol (LED) to provide guidance on recording a moment phenomenologically, including five specific strategies: write the moment chronologically; describe what the researcher sees, hears, feels, and thinks; describe the moment as if "you are watching it on film"; write about the event "as you lived through it" avoiding explanations or generalizations or interpretations; and write using concrete descriptions avoiding "flowery terminology" (p. 88). The phenomenological writings were written throughout the research process in bursts as moments of tension, clarity, elation, and unease presented themselves. This process sought to uncover my own role as a participant in this research and how this participation impacted my interpretation of the participants' narratives, as well as how it impacted which narratives they chose to convey. These writings

comprised part of the research field notes and were used in the analysis of the research-as-COP aspect of this study.

Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008) write that when we are immersed in an activity or an experience, we experience the “natural attitude” when we do not consciously analyze or scrutinize the moments of an event, at least until a mistake is made or something unexpected occurs. It is during this instant that we redirect energies toward analysis of our lived experience in the moment. They write that until that instant we are “lost in actual activity” and that “the things we are closest to are the things that are most hidden from us” and that “scrutiny of what is tacit is necessary” (p. 34). Locke (2016) argues that phenomenology can be used to examine issues of inclusion where inclusion means more than the formal inclusion of an individual within an organizational context, such as language learner or employment; inclusion must also mean the intersubjective experiences with “embodied dimensions” – a way of “being in line” with other beings (p. 824). In other words, how do the researcher and participants respond to each other? What potential manifestations of the differentials in power, culture, language, authority, etc. exist in the moment? What potential manifestations of these differentials are expressed by the participants in the interviews? With a focus on intersubjectivity through phenomenological writing, the study could explore more deeply how past, present, and future environments and interactions rise up in specific instances to empower and disempower English learners in the many capacities of their lived experiences.

Coding and grounded theory. Each individual interview transcript and self-recording were entered into Atlas.ti and labeled chronologically to show the progression of interview themes and to ensure fairness in providing an “evenhanded representation of all viewpoints” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 107). Providing space for all of the interview voices, each hermeneutic set of

interviews and accompanying self-recordings were analyzed as a unit and coded according to concepts in the theoretical framework and emerging themes and were also analyzed to explore any changes in perspectives over time. Individual sets of interview and self-report transcripts were first analyzed as self-contained units and then cross-examined, along with segments of the researcher field notes related to participants' shifting identities within the research process, to explore patterns and themes across all participants.

A grounded theory approach was used to focus on the values, beliefs, perspectives, and perceptions of all the participants (Rodwell, 1998, p. 59). To clarify, Glaser and Straus (1967) define grounded theory as theory generated from qualitative research that will

fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use. By "fit" we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by "work" we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study (p. 3).

Grounded theory then essentially serves two purposes: to tie together a study by connecting all of its various parts and to provide a theoretical model for subsequent research (Davis, 1995). Data collected from interviews, self-reports, and field notes were analyzed inductively from the raw data, and an open coding practice placed the data into categories based on their relatedness to each other (Rodwell, 1998, p. 154). Open coding provided the mechanism to best reflect the expressed perceptions and experiences of the participants without establishing an a priori structure that may have potentially limited or mis-categorized important insights. While there were three overarching themes around which data collection revolved (i.e., COPs, identities, and patterns of participation), a coding structure was not set prior to data collection.

Additionally, this approach allowed for a post-analysis determination of the alignment between the theoretical framework and the participants' expressed experiences with identity negotiation.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness has been likened to positivist and post-positivist notions of reliability and validity to demonstrate “truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 59). However, within a constructivist and interpretivist paradigm, these criteria do not hold. Inferences from the research are not meant to be generalizable or neutral; they are subjective findings, dependent on situational and interactional elements of the research.

Naturalistic inquiry by its nature is value-bound, and the interactions between researcher and participant are an important component in the learning that comes from the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). While this qualitative method does not allow for the construction of a generalized truth, it does allow for an intersubjective representation of truth with relevance and transferability for others in similar situations. The credibility of the study speaks to its “accuracy in understanding the depth and scope of the issues under study” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 98). To enhance trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest a list of strategies to strengthen credibility and transferability of a study (p. 77). The following strategies are adapted from that list and were incorporated into the design of this work:

- prolonged engagement to enhance the credibility of the findings;
- multiple methods of data collection, including interviews, participants' self-reports, and researcher field notes;
- reflexive journaling to document the intersubjective nature of the study and to document my own perceptions of my role in the construction of the study;

- multiple member checks to review findings and interpretations with participants on at least two occasions;
- the maintenance of a methodological log to account for all interactions and activities related to the research, as well as to account for the rationales for any changes in methods; and
- thick description, incorporating samples of the raw data, to provide sufficient information to make the findings relevant and transferable.

Authenticity

Authenticity in research is specific to constructivist research designs. It is a means of establishing rigor related to the quality of the research process itself and is focused on the interactive elements of the work (Rodwell, 1998). Authenticity involves several dimensions, three of which were particularly important to this study: fairness, ontological authenticity, and educative authenticity. Fairness involves ensuring that all participants have voice and that all perspectives, regardless of discrepancies, are treated with equal weight. The second directly relevant dimension, ontological authority, has as its goal an “increased awareness of the complexity of the constructions of the phenomenon” and a level of “consciousness raising” (p. 108) through the construction and re-construction of perspectives through the hermeneutic practice, allowing participants’ perspectives on the subject under investigation to expand and change as part of the process. As much as possible, the research design allowed for multiple opportunities for reflection and co-construction of knowledge, expanding participants’ understanding of theirs and other’s perspectives of the phenomenon. And finally, it was hoped that the hermeneutic process built into the study would facilitate educative authenticity, an increased appreciation of others’ values and perspectives on a given topic. While the participants

in this study were not meeting together in a synchronous, co-located group, the incorporation of themes and information from one interview into the probes of future interviews, as well as the two member-checking interview sessions where participants reflected on the viewpoints of all participants, allowed for a co-construction of knowledge and of a mutual understanding – if not agreement – of the phenomenon.

I believe the first three dimensions discussed above contributed to increased equalization as participants in this research process and hopefully in their mainstream COPs. This was a desired outcome of this line of research, and it is hoped that this initial step contributed toward that goal.

Ethical Concerns

Procedures to preserve the anonymity, confidentiality, and well-being of the study's participants were taken throughout the study. To begin, the study underwent the process for approval by Virginia Commonwealth University's IRB. Participants were provided consent forms at the commencement of our interactions, and we walked through the parameters of the study, the expectations for their participation, and their option to suspend participation or to decline to discuss any topic at any point without penalty. Participants also chose a pseudonym that was used in all interview transcripts, self-report transcripts, field notes, drafts of the report, and all subsequent publications related to the research. The a priori plan of research was to audio record all interviews, and participants had the option to decline recording, and all audio and text files were stored in a password-protected folder on a VCU-supported server. The three-interview process also provided two opportunities to conduct member checks with participants when they had opportunities to review transcripts either in writing or through an oral review, depending on

preference and literacy level. And all participants had multiple opportunities to discuss findings as they emerged - rejecting, accepting, and recommending alterations.

Expected Findings

Although no a priori codes were incorporated into the methodology, I came to the study with some expectations from my prior research on topics related to immigration and English learning, experiences working with immigrant populations, and current events. Of particular influence were the themes presented in the literature review: communities, identities, and patterns of participation. These three overarching concepts guided the development of the study as well as the interview protocols, and, while the study design and interview content were emergent in nature, the initial content and eventual data reflected these themes. Secondly, my own experiences with English learners as a teacher and as a volunteer, as well as the large body of research I have read that detail engrained and institutionalized practices of marginalization for ELLs, colored my expectations going into the study. I went into this process expecting to learn primarily about barriers to participation in communities, including prejudice, lack of opportunities for education and training, lack of interactions with native English speakers, and feelings of stress and anxiety related to the tasks and responsibilities of navigating a new culture and a new bureaucratic system. I also went into this study hoping to learn how adult ELLs navigated these tensions and achieved legitimacy within communities to which they desired membership. Finally, I expected the current political climate and general media rhetoric aimed at immigrant groups to color the narratives of the study; this proved to be untrue in all but one of the cases.

My study aimed to focus on instances of inclusion and resilience, and, from my experiences and research, I anticipated that I would hear about several factors related to these

themes: learners' past experiences bolstering their agency and confidence (Norton, 2013); their faith acting as an empowering agent (personal communications with members of immigrant communities); the presence of a mentor who supported them (Morita, 2004); or driving aspirations for themselves and their children (Norton, 2001). While I expected to find themes along these lines of thought, I consciously worked to expand the discussion and focus on other potential sources and moments of agency and empowerment.

Chapter 4 Findings

My initial motivation behind this study was to focus on instances of social integration between adult ELLs and native English speakers in mutually defining COPs so that their ways of being in interaction within those COPs could be distilled and incorporated into instructional and programmatic design for adult ELLs. While all of the adult ELLs who participated in the study had experienced some level of legitimate participation in particular COPs with English speakers (e.g., work places, churches, or home-country professional experiences with Americans), their trajectories in these respective COPs remained peripheral, and they often regressed to marginal positions that left little room for growth or inclusion. None of the participants in the study expressed that they had experienced social integration at a level that could be characterized as legitimate or equal. Wenger (1998) writes that our identities are constructed by both our past experiences and our futures and that identity is a “nexus of membership,” defined by how we “reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity” (p. 149). There were, however, specific situations and events where the participants’ legitimacy in a single COP was confirmed and reinforced, and these were invaluable to their capacity to think about planning a future here in this country; however, the social, emotional, situational, and even political barriers that confronted the group on a consistent basis prompted all of the participants in the study to express a sense of pervasive social isolation and marginalization that permeated all of their English-speaking COPs.

During the three interviews and the weekly self-recordings, each participant revealed a fluctuating identification with their past, current, and occasionally their future selves. Most of the time they expressed an inability to even consider future goals, because the demands of existing in the present were overwhelming and all consuming. Many waxed nostalgically about the lives they had lived in their home countries, though this connectedness varied drastically, even within a single hour-long interview.

A prevailing theme from all participants who contributed narratives to the study was a focus on advocacy and the importance of being able to advocate for themselves and for each other. Rather than belonging to a cohesive, physically co-located COP with native English speakers, a major theme that emerged was perceived membership and an emotional connection to a larger spatially disparate COP comprised of immigrants in the United States that spanned both time and geography. In one way or another all expressed a need to self-advocate, to advocate for each other, and to seek out others who were in similar situations in order to feel “stronger” and more connected to others.

The crux of the data focuses on each participant’s fluctuating trajectories along interconnected plains of shifting identities and varying capacities to advocate for themselves and for others in their situations as immigrants. Their plot points would shift either subtly or drastically, over weeks or within the temporal confines of a single encounter, impacting both how they perceived themselves as members of their communities and how they were able to participate in them. During the three-month span of the study, the participants demonstrated and perceived having constantly changing levels of agency within their COPs with no discernable linear patterns toward fuller participation; a single incident or remark was often a stimulus for a change in either one or both of their moving trajectories. Unlike the relatively linear trajectory

toward LPP put forth by Lave and Wenger (1991), Figure 3 reflects the shifting and nonlinear trajectories expressed by the study participants.

The plot points in the figure below are symbolic and do not represent empirical data; however, they reflect the non-linear and often seemingly chaotic nature of the participants' trajectories toward legitimate participation in their communities. One participant's trajectory toward LPP, for example, was stymied and propelled by interactions with native English speakers in her neighborhood and with others in a desired COP, an artists' gallery. At a morning bus stop other mothers left her out of conversations, and a neighbor began to ignore her after they attended a church service together. She also expressed frustration when Americans would talk about politics involving her home country, and she felt she could not adequately defend herself. These repeated incidents of social isolation and rejection reinforced feelings of otherness; however, she also experienced inclusion in a desired COP when she submitted artwork that earned an award at a local gallery. The plot points on the figure below are representative of the ebbs and flows of these patterns of inclusion and exclusion that characterized the trajectories toward LPP of all of the participants in this study.

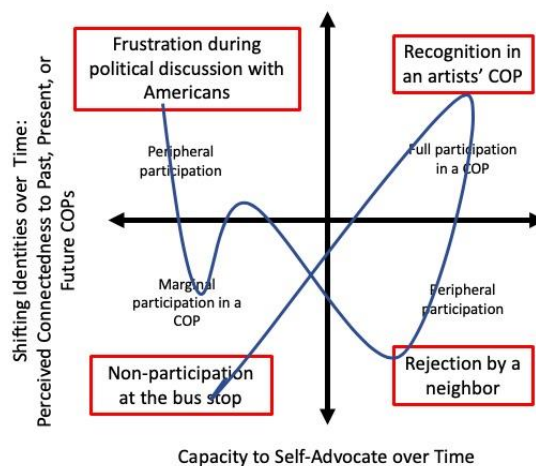


Figure 3. Non-linear trajectory of legitimate participation in COPs

Throughout the study, the participants' trajectories were consistently redirected by the myriad challenges and tensions that arose from their unique situations as immigrants and English learners in a particular moment in this country. And while the barriers to legitimate participation within desired and perceived communities were overwhelming in their narratives, there were also many instances of hope and resilience that pointed to their progress toward living a fuller version of their lives that could account for the life experiences, intellect, education, and worth they bring to their new American COPs.

There are two major sections in this chapter: an overview of major themes and case studies that focus on the temporal and shifting nature of the ELLs' identities. A discussion of COP membership and participation that explicitly answers the study's research questions follows in chapter five. The discussion will begin with an overview of the major themes of the study and then will continue with a presentation of each individual case in the study, utilizing their narratives to illustrate the major themes. The case studies focus on the temporal and changing nature of adult ELLs' connections to past, present, and future selves in flux with the interactions and patterns of participation they experience within their communities. The narratives themselves will drive the analysis, following the narrative inquiry focus of the research design. Reflexive and phenomenological reflections are included within each case to critically question the role of the researcher as an intersubjective presence in the study who both shapes and interprets the words and experiences of the adults in this research. The next chapter will then shift to a cross-case discussion of the study's research questions, identifying and elaborating on themes of membership and belonging that run throughout the participants' narratives. The case studies are presented before the explicit responses to the study's research questions in order to

provide a fuller context for each participant that will help clarify the temporal and shifting nature of the driving question of COP membership and how the participants' trajectories toward legitimate participation in COPs is dependent on situational factors both within and outside of the target community.

Major Themes of the Narratives

The theoretical framework for this study is based on two overarching and intersecting concepts: access to COPs as spaces for situated learning and the role of identity negotiation in situated learning. The major themes that ran through most of the participants' narratives aligned with this framework and revealed patterns of access to COPs, the desire to belong to certain COPs, and a vacillating connectedness to past, present, and future identities. See Table 2, Themes and Codes from Transcribed Interviews and Self-reflections in Appendix F.

Eight adult ELLs participated in the study: five from an English language class and three from a refugee resettlement organization. For those from the English class, this served as an important COP where they felt stronger and more connected to others who they perceived were going through similar experiences. While they worked to learn language in the class, the larger benefit seemed to be a sense of connectedness to others in their present circumstances as immigrants. For those in the refugee resettlement group, their home-culture social groups (in this case, Afghan) provided a valuable service in socialization, emotional support, and guidance in navigating the bureaucratic systems of American life. All expressed a preference for international social groups rather than American-dominated groups, expressing that they felt they had more common ground with other immigrants than they could establish with American-born peers. Regardless of language or professional background, general social isolation from Americans was a common theme, even for the one woman who is married to an American; full

participation in any English-dominant COP was illusive for all of the participants. Time spent in the United States was also not an apparent determinant of COP membership; in fact, one man who had arrived only several months prior to the study had perceived levels of COP membership higher than any of the other participants, two of whom had lived in this country for more than a decade.

The narratives of all the participants revealed intersecting levels of identity negotiation (i.e., connectedness to past, present, and future selves) and levels of capacity for self-advocacy and advocacy for others who they perceived were in similar situations. During the three-month study, the narratives reflected advocacy-based trajectories of legitimate peripheral participation, moving back and forth in flux along with their changing interactions in COPs. Within the small study group, different cultural backgrounds demonstrated different levels of connectedness to their home language groups here in the United States. The Afghans from the refugee resettlement agency considered their social Afghan group membership beneficial to their well-being, and they desired connectedness to this cultural group. They expressed a desire to join English-speaking COPs primarily for professional and educational growth. Two of the three Spanish speakers actively avoided membership in Spanish-speaking COPs in order to learn more English. Another Spanish speaker worked and socialized primarily with Spanish speakers without any expressed goals to interact with more English speakers; he still had the goal to learn more English, however not in connection with professional or educational goals, but more as an intellectual exercise. Four of the participants were from South America, and there was an expressed sense that their language and cultural identities were somehow considered “inferior” to others. For these four participants, membership in a home language group was not sought, and in tandem with their general isolation from English-speaking groups, they experienced higher levels of social and

emotional isolation than those who affiliated often with other home-language speakers. These intersecting themes of identity negotiation and COP membership (both temporal and language-based) often corresponded to their patterns of participation in their interactions with English speakers. The following case studies show how this happened over time for three of the participants, and for the other five, the case studies focus on how specific aspects of their experiences as immigrants impacted their patterns of participation.

Case Studies

Eight participants were initially recruited for the study; five of the eight participated in all three interviews and submitted self-reflections (either written or audio-recorded) at the second and third meetings. Two others participated in the first two interviews, with one of them submitting written reflections at the second interview. These two were unable to participate in the third round of interviews, one because of work relocation out of town and the other because of an illness in the family. Another participated only in the first interview and shortly thereafter secured a full-time job in his area of expertise, changing his schedule and limiting his ability to participate in further interviews. All names used throughout the next chapters are pseudonyms chosen by the participants at our first interview meeting. Table 1 on the next page includes selected demographic information about each participant in the study.

The interviews lasted sixty to ninety minutes each and were conducted over the course of three months for a total of twenty interviews. Between interviews I sent weekly text message reminders for participants to record reflections on either an audio recorder or in a journal that I had provided them, and at the second and third meetings, we discussed the reflections, and I transferred the recordings to my computer for transcription. Each participant had slightly different prompts for the reflections based on our conversations during the interviews, and all

were encouraged to record anything they felt was important to the topics of the study. Following a hermeneutic practice and incorporating two opportunities for member checks on the general findings among the group, many themes were reinforced and elaborated on, allowing for a kind of asynchronous COP that built on each other’s experiences and their perceptions of those experiences.

Table 1. Selected demographic information for each of the eight initial study participants

| | Country of origin | Time in United States | Age | Profession in home country | Current job | Education in home country |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------------|--|--|
| Maria ^a | Russia | 3 years | 32 | Processing Engineer | Homemaker | University/college |
| Amy ^a | Colombia | 12.5 years | 63 | Business Consultant | Self-employed house and office cleaner | University/college |
| Jawad ^a | Afghanistan | 4 months | 36 | Business Management | Warehousing (Vitamin Shoppe)/ Unemployed | University/college |
| Patricia ^a | Brazil | 2 years | 29 | Tourism and Hospitality | Nanny | University/college |
| Ohahni ^a | El Salvador | 13 years | 28 | N/A | Warehousing (Amazon) | High school and postsecondary in U.S. & certifications |
| David ^b | El Salvador | 7.5 years | 42 | Airline Associate | Construction worker | University/college |
| John ^b | Afghanistan | 8 months | X ^c | Systems Manager | Valet and pizza delivery | University/college |
| Trevor ^b | Afghanistan | 10 months | 31 | Data Manager | Valet / Data management | University/college |

Note. The “Time in United States” column denotes the time in the country for each participant at the beginning of the study.

^a Participated in all three of the interviews and submitted self-reflections and is included in both the case study and analysis sections of this chapter.

^b Participated in at least one interview and is included in the analysis section of this chapter.

^c John's participation in the study ended before I learned his age.

What follows is an accounting of the narratives and of the research process itself, written to reflect the changing nature of their expressed perceptions and interactions as time progressed both during the individual interview sessions and over the three months of the study. All of the participants discussed the roles of language, culture, and otherness in their experiences; four of the cases in particular exhibited noticeable shifts in self-perceived identity throughout the research. The first three of the participants in the case studies demonstrated a remarkable meta-awareness of how they were changed through their interactions with their communities here in the United States. Following these three in-depth case studies are more concise treatments of the other participants' connections to specific themes that tie them to the theoretical framework guiding this study: identities in interaction with communities of practice.

Maria

Maria is a 32-year-old woman from Russia with two sons. One son is eight years old and in second grade at school, and the other is four, and she drives him to speech therapy sessions and preschool. In Russia, she attended university and worked as an engineer. Her husband was relocated to the United States for his work three years ago (he is also an engineer), and they recently bought and moved into a new house in a suburban area. She studied English in Russia until the eleventh grade and had not used English since then. She attends an English language class at a local adult education program during the fall and spring semesters.

She loves painting, and at the first interview, her paintings lined the walls of the living room where we met. They were colorful scenes from home: "Yes, it's my hobby. Yes, I love it. It's my parents, these are my parents. I'm missing...I paint what I want."

During my first visit with her, Maria described her transition to life in the United States as much more difficult than she expected:

It's hard for me. It's very hard still. When I just arrived, I thought it would be very easy for me. Every year it's harder and harder. I don't know why. It's like ...right now because I'm scared that I want to understand what they will say to me, and they want to understand what I will say to them. It's like I'm scared that they will think I am silly - it's really a problem.

Maria's fear of rejection within acts of communication colors many of her interactions, and she tends to avoid initiating conversations. She does not yet have a work permit, and, outside of her English class, her interactions with English speakers are largely limited to children-related activities. She mentions one friend in particular whom she has met through her children but also in the same utterance mentions that she desires to find an artists' community where she can find friends:

I met her in Romp 'n' Roll... I met a lot of wonderful moms there. ... I remember that I wanted to find some community or place where I can find friends, not even friends, just people with whom I can talk... I want to do is to find some artists community, which I already found... Just you know to talk with people with the same interests like me, because you know it's very specific. I want to share, to learn something new, because it's just interesting for me.... I've found, but I have to just start. You know it's hard, because they are all Americans. And this is a fear for me. And I have to overcome.

She repeatedly expressed frustration over the limited range of conversation topics she seemed able to engage in, as well as how much she desired a community where she could express herself as she used to be able to do in Russia. The English class she attends provides

another outlet for social interaction and also, she admits, opens up her mind about people from cultures outside of Russia and the United States: “Yes, and it's fun. You know, I met a lot of people over there, and can I say that I had like bias about people from countries like Mexico, but when I started to attend these classes, I understood that these people are the same like me or like Americans, like good guys.”

This theme of opening up to other kinds of people is one she revisited several times during our interviews, not just for herself but also for how she sees her children changing as a result of living here in interaction with a more diverse population than she experienced in her home town in Russia. However, at this first interview, her focus was still very split between her past self and her current situation. When asked about whether she wanted to stay here or would prefer to return home, she hesitated:

My husband he wants to stay here, me, I'm not sure honestly. Because, how to explain, I don't know how to explain because my heart is there...My husband thinks all about it, I am more like spiritual - like to think about you know - not nostalgic. I don' t know how to say, not even in Russian. I'm just missing, and I want to help my parents there.

Throughout the first interview, the draw of the past was palpable. When she spoke about her paintings she seemed short of breath, as if the memory weighed on her or as if she were being pulled back there. When we spoke about the present, she seemed frustrated and impatient, the current feelings of isolation that she expressed coloring all aspects of her life here and making the idea of staying difficult to imagine. The paintings seemed to constitute a physical connection between her past and her present and a way to take her back and make her old life real again.

For the first round of recorded self-reflections, Maria focused on her daily interactions as they occurred and how she felt during them. She also complained that she was tired of talking only about her children and that her topics of conversations with Americans were generally quite limited. But she also talked about interactions that were more complex, including one with an American friend she met at Romp 'n' Roll, a place where she takes her son to play. Over the course of two audio-recorded reflections, she commented on a single conversation she had with this friend:

Recently I met with my friend. She's American. I met her two years ago at Romp 'n' Roll... and she likes to talk with me about politics, which honestly, I don't really like, because to talk about politics is useless because you can't change anything....And I really appreciate that she talks about that with me, because during that type of conversation ...I remember a lot of new words I can use later... Of course, I don't have enough maybe vocabulary to convince her that my country's not so bad. My president - not mine but the president of my country is not a monster, like she thinks...

In the next audio-recorded reflection, she added,

And ... I forgot to say what I felt during that type of conversation. Of course, I felt myself sad, because I don't have enough words. I don't have enough vocabulary to convince her of something or to argue with her, you know, yes. But what else? So, yes, I felt not enough, like I felt that I didn't say what I really wanted to say.

That this stream of thought continued over two separate audio recordings and then again in the following interview shows its importance in Maria's mind. This American is a woman with whom she has a social relationship, one she says makes her happy and helps her feel more connected to the world outside of her home. The relationship is also a vital source of English

language, something she repeatedly says she craves. But it also reveals the tensions that arise when she tries to engage in conversations that go beyond surface-level observations or chit-chat about their children. She complains that she lacks the vocabulary, particularly in real-time, to defend political opinions and to defend comments aimed at her home country. In this situation, she lacks the capacity to self-advocate.

Another reflection discussed an incident with a neighbor who convinced Maria, a Russian Orthodox, to come with her to a luncheon at her Baptist church, despite Maria's insistence that she already had a religion she practices:

I said to her that I'm another religion. I'm Orthodox, but she said you know, God is one, and it doesn't matter... Of course, I felt myself very uncomfortable there because there were a lot of unknown people for me, and they were of course nice, but I felt myself not in my place, and my neighbor, she pushed me if I would sing the songs with her and with them... It's not my religion, and I didn't expect all of that, and when we came back after a couple of days, she asked if I would like to come with her again. She was sure I will agree, but I decided to refuse her. I tried to explain that it's not my religion, and I was very polite, but of course, I don't have enough vocabulary to explain all of her feelings, and I didn't want to touch her feelings, because it's a religion, and it's a very controversial question... So right now I see that she became colder to me and I think she didn't understand me correct, and I feel coldness - I don't know how to say - some cold from that moment. I tried to give her something. If I bake something at home, I give her to share, yes, she's nice, but I don't feel that truth or that warm relationship, how it was before that visiting her church. For once I feel myself bad. Yes, I refused her, but from

another side, I think she should put herself in my place, and what am I supposed to do? If I don't like that really, I can't explain to her what about my feelings...

In our second interview, Maria expanded on this interaction and used the concept of a “traitor” to illustrate how she felt about the Baptist church incident:

I don't have my church here, you know I said to you last night, but I was in a Baptist church and I recorded that. First time in my life. It was very interesting, that's why I agreed to visit but I think I don't want to... It just, I feel myself - something it was mine, my religion - during the war, I want to explain this feeling - for example, when I go to the enemy's side - how do you say this word? For example, I quit my country and felt this also about my religion. Because it's mine and this is completely different. I said, please don't be offended, but I don't know. Maybe it's not that, or maybe she doesn't have patience to hear me.

The tension between her home culture and her new culture was a prevalent theme in Maria's narratives. Her inability to defend her country in a political discussion and her neighbor's insistence that she come to her church acted as new boundaries between her current and past selves and also between her new country and her home country which she visits every year and where her family, with whom she is very close, still lives. These moments seem like a rupture in her tenuous peace of mind, and she acted almost panicked when she talked about both of these incidents, as if these two women were forces trying to pry her loose from the connections to her past.

In the interviews, she often complained that people did not show any patience with her when she spoke, that they would finish her sentences for her if she hesitated to take time to think of a word. In many instances, she may represent her neighbors' first (or at least one of only a

very few) interactions with non-native speakers of English. During the second interview, when asked about her desires for her future, she responded, “I never think about it honestly.” So, we talked about what would make life here better for her:

I don't know. It's all around language. I would feel myself more comfortable if of course I would know English well. Sometimes I don't understand people - what they're saying me. That makes me feel so stupid that I don't understand them - very uncomfortable. You know, I'm mad at myself, because I know that I'm not, but I hate when people - I think if she thinks about me in that way, I feel so sad about myself. And I think, why? I should read more. Some people say you should find a job, and you will talk just like them, maybe. Maybe next year...sometimes I don't know, sometimes I think I need psychologist's help, someone who can fix it in my head - the problem is in my head only.

Maria was much more concerned with the present in the second interview than in the first when she spoke mostly about the past. The tensions brought up by the Russian politics discussion and the Baptist church incidents weighed heavily on her self-reflections and also in our discussions about how her interactions with Americans left her feeling “stupid” and isolated. Her response to the question about her future desires reveals an understandable preoccupation with her struggles to command her present life through language. Here she expresses that she both feels “uncomfortable” when she can't understand people and also mad at herself and “sad” for herself because of what she believes are others' perceptions of her. In this moment she adds fixing “it in [her] head” to language-learning as two tasks that have to be completed before she can contemplate her future here. In the second interview she seems more “stuck” in present struggles than she appeared to be in the first where she seemed to escape more to her past.

During the second round of self-reflections, Maria shared that a painting she had submitted to a competition at a local art gallery had won third place and would be on display for a month. She seemed elated about the recognition, and in a text message to me she referred to the award as her “little achievement”; however, she recorded that she was anxious during the entire award ceremony in part because she had brought her family along with her, and her sons were “running around and screaming” but also because being the in the spotlight frazzled her to the point where she felt incapable of using either English or Russian to interact with other people there:

I felt very nervous there, and at the same time happy, but I didn't really realize what's going on because I was in the spotlight... And of course, when I'm nervous I'm in such kind of situations, my brain completely stops thinking, even in English, even in Russian. It's like, who am I? Where am I? People ask me something, and of course I didn't understand anything. At the time my brain turned off, I just I think I looked like an idiot, because I was smiling and waving my hand and said, ‘thank you, thank you,’ and I couldn't really show and explain my emotions, but of course I would like to, but I just couldn't. I felt naked. I wanted to quit all of that and run away.



Figure 4. Maria's award-winning painting

The painting in Figure 4 that won the award is of her grandmother making pies in her kitchen, a physical connection to her past world, and one that may have served as a positive connection to her new present through the opportunity to express herself and achieve recognition by a desired COP in ways that resemble her past self – a kind of bridge between selves. (See Figure 4.) Despite the uncomfortable incident at the award ceremony, her other recordings on this round showed a more optimistic outlook on her life in the United States, and she talked about engaging in conversations with several neighbors who seemed genuinely interested in discussing personal aspects of their lives:

Today in the morning I talked with one of my neighbors, she asked me about my Russian trip, and I said that next week I'm going there, that I'm scared to go there alone with two kids, and you know, she started to share her information for the first time with me that someone from her family wanted to adopt kid from Russia, but he was so sick that he couldn't do it...It was for the first time that she was interested in my country and in my

experience, it was nice for me because I know a lot of information, and I can share with anybody who is interested, but if a person doesn't ask me any questions, I prefer not to talk about. Because I'm afraid I will bother somebody, and maybe because of my experience, because before that I wanted sometimes to talk, and I started to explain something about my country and about everything, and I saw completely uninterested faces sometimes, so that's why right now I prefer not to talk first or even, I don't know how to explain, and of course, I would like to share with people my experience, my information, my thoughts about something. I can say a lot in Russian, but unfortunately, I can't explain all that I want in English, but I promise that I will improve my language, and this is my first target.

In this interview she seemed more confident in her ability to improve her English communication skills. In the incident she described here, she was a legitimate participant in the social interaction, able to utilize her past experience and knowledge in a present situation as a valuable asset and contribution to the interaction. In other ways, too, including her achievement with the art award, she began to express a more comfortable perception of her place in her community, a version of herself that began to feel more aligned to her own self-perceptions and to her past.

She acknowledged how she felt herself changing as a result of her relocation here, too. Her final reflection began with a comment that her American friend from Romp 'n' Roll made, accusing Maria of being very "close-minded" when she first arrived here and holding stereotypes about the way people live. And in Maria's reflection, she generally agrees that her interactions with this American friend and with her classmates have opened up her "mind to the world." In connection to this feeling of openness to other kinds of people, the theme of the value of

immigrants who are often unable to advocate for themselves and advance in their lives because of English carried over into our third interview. She finished her reflection by arguing that,

I don't know how to explain, and here there are more freedoms, more opportunities for people, and that's why ...there are a lot of best people with brains come here to build their future, a future for themselves, for their family and kids, and I think immigrants make this country, and because they have to survive here. They are not lazy, they have to find ways to be alive, to find a way to solve their problems, so yes that's why United States is so successful country... I met a lot of people, even from a lot of countries, for example, from Mexico, El Salvador. I didn't know that they had university diploma and they work here like on construction, people with university diploma work on construction, so it's so sad, and I see how educated they are. Maybe they can't express themselves because of lack of English, but I see how they are different, they like to read, yes, maybe they are close-minded like me because they are from different countries not from the United States, but still, so immigrants are the future of this country.

We discussed the idea expressed by other participants in the study that language was the primary factor holding them back from being able to advance in their lives. She said that she agreed completely and reflected back on the art award ceremony as an instance when she had been recognized for her talents but could not engage with anyone to increase her inclusion in a community to which she desired to belong:

Because I think right now only language doesn't give me this opportunity to improve, because even during that ... exhibition, of course, I would go to the art teacher to ask him about ... my job...but you know, I felt myself, right now I feel so shy - why I didn't - I saw he was very busy, he was talking with others. I was waiting for him...and maybe I

should wait more time for him, but again, I can't just ... you know, I would like to get some education, I would like to be an art teacher, but I have to go to learn how to be a teacher then to learn art. I don't have an art education...maybe just in my mind, but I agree about language.

She also suggested in the interview that her shyness and the inability to speak under pressure in either her first language or in English is a characteristic that is anchored in her current situation and not an enduring trait that characterized her life in Russia.

We also discussed the idea expressed by many in the study that they felt like they were two different people: one who existed back home and a new, morphing version of themselves here. Maria was in complete agreement with this idea and said she still experiences this when she visits home:

For example, my parents know me Maria from one side, but they don't know me like a person here. I'm completely different because my mind was open more, you know, and I started to look at some things different...People in my country are very close-minded, and here...I try to greet these stereotypes about people even, you know? Right now I take a look at them in a different way. If, for example, my parents would be here, that's not our daughter. But I changed. This country changed me. And I see that my kids are different from kids in my country, and I like it. Yes, I like it. Yes, because this freedom, and you can express what you think... Yes, you know, maybe I play a role for my family...

Maria and her two sons were planning to travel home a week after this interview to visit family in Russia for two months. From the first interview when she expressed her all-encompassing longing for her home country to this final statement, during the months that Maria participated in the study, her connectedness to her Russian and American lives seemed to shift

drastically, not completely linearly, toward a more American connection. We talked about this shifting, even within a single interview, as something that happened to everyone who participated in this study. She had this to say about her own changing identity:

Maybe depends on the mood, maybe you know next year if I will hear my records I will say oh, goodness. So maybe I will change my mind, probably, because always I feel changes within myself. And I feel this gap [between] my country and the United States. Gap between myself and that Maria and this Maria, and every year it's bigger and bigger, you know. You know it's the first year when I really don't have enough, I don't really, I want, of course, I miss my family, but I have house here. I have my family here, and I don't want to go.

Maria was one of the more open participants in the study, and her reflections were consistently thorough and thoughtful. As we were saying goodbye at the final interview, she commented that it was “interesting” that she could help me. Her apparent comfort level talking with me during the interviews and sharing personal feelings during the reflections grew drastically over the course of the study, too. During the first interview, I hesitated to ask too many questions, because I got the sense that she was uncomfortable and unsure of what she wanted to say, and, consequently, the first interview with her was the shortest of the study. The second and third interviews were more than twice the length of the second, and the conversations flowed easily.

Maria was open, warm, and very self-critical of her language and her apparent shyness, a trait that frustrated her. And while I felt very comfortable talking with her, I began to feel more self-conscious about some of the behaviors I might have been exhibiting, behaviors that she identified in her reflections and especially in the second interview as stymying her progress as a

language learner and as an active participant in social interactions - namely English speakers' lack of patience with her when she hesitated over a word. I began to monitor how often I would offer a word or finish an utterance for her and hoped I had not inspired the reflection about the frustration she felt when this happened to her.

The moment that most stands out from my meetings with Maria is during the third interview when she begins to discuss, without explicitly naming him, another participant in the study, a classmate from her English class. She seemed almost transported when she began speaking in rapid and completely fluent English, gesticulating with her hands, about how difficult it was for him and others like him who, because of a legal status that limits their movement in and out of the country, cannot visit home. She talked about the sacrifices many of her classmates make by staying here, "stuck" and unable to form romantic relationships, go to college, or to go home to see family members. Her care for the people she had met in these situations was palpable.

During the whole of the research process, she talked about her own circumstances and struggles here, but she did not seem to want to share personal details about her life back home in Russia. She discussed daily interactions and larger events like the art award that, sewn together, created a story that seemed to be propelled along a future-oriented trajectory and toward a more fulfilling existence here. She openly struggled with not only her frustration at not being able to express herself easily through language but also with how she was handling the transition here, one that she imagined would be much easier. It was only in the third interview that I felt comfortable probing with follow-up questions about how she felt about what was happening in her life here; before that she had seemed too fragile and on the verge of receding into herself. But during this last interview, she seemed strong and resilient, optimistic, and comfortable with

herself. It could have been that she needed the time to get comfortable with me, and that this version of Maria is more reflective of who she really is. It could have been her art award boosting her confidence or an increase in interactions with English-speaking friends and neighbors lessening her feelings of isolation. It might also have been her impending visit back home that put her two lives in in more direct contrast to one another. Whatever it was, she didn't seem fragile anymore.

Amy

Amy is a 63-year-old woman from Colombia who moved to the United States for a work opportunity. In Colombia she had worked as a consultant and a trainer for people who were starting businesses, and she had studied technology and accounting. After several business partnerships that depleted her savings, she became worried about her prospects of finding gainful employment and accepted a friend's offer for a job in the United States, quickly securing a visa to move here. She has worked in a private home as a nanny, in a club as a hostess, and in a bakery but not as a baker. She currently works independently cleaning houses and offices. She has lived in the United States for twelve and a half years and is planning to return home to Colombia to be near her son and her grandchildren whom she has not yet met in person. She is a warm and smiling woman who goes out of her way to lend help and support to the people in her life. She describes herself: "And after I was a child, I like to help people, and I like to share with people. I like to motivate people - to do things, to get things, how to do better things, how to be better person, or if I can, give advice. Yes, I am this kind of person, and if I can help you, what I can do for you."

For all of our interviews, we met in a reserved study room at a library close to her home. Our first interview focused on where and in what kinds of groups she practiced English and was

much less personal than the second and third meetings. Persistent themes of social isolation, frustration at not being able to fully express herself in English, and tensions surrounding her desire to return home ran throughout Amy's interviews and reflections. In order to show how her perceptions of her situation and her feelings about being caught between her American and Colombian selves shifted back and forth over the three months, I will present the data related to each of the themes in chronological order.

The theme of social isolation was prevalent throughout all of Amy's interviews and self-reflections and impacted how she felt she was able to interact with others, particularly English speakers.

Amy: ... sometimes I got depressed, yes, I do not have anybody to talk - I do not have a real friend...

Me: Still?

Amy: Yes. It is very difficult for me to have real friends, because people used to come to me because they need something I can do - and this is my feeling. (First interview)

Amy described herself as both "strong" and "independent", but this feeling that her relationships were service-oriented rather than based on a mutual affection was prevalent in the three interviews and especially in her reflections. Her sense of isolation and depression as a result of her perceived lack of what she considered true friendships weighed heavily on her during the study. Here she shared an isolating incident that happened to her in her church where she volunteers about six weeks after she made the previous statement about not having true friends:

I understand that they are working in a hurry because there are around two hundred people and we have to move quickly, serving, quickly, fast, and that was my first day I

met her. And she told me something, and I said, excuse me? And when I said excuse me, she didn't want to repeat to me, she was in a hurry, and she had an attitude that hurt my feeling. I understand perfectly that I do not speak English, I do not understand, I do not do work under pressure, and when she told me, when she talked to me that way and I didn't understand, I felt that she got upset, and she took everything and left, and I said, oh my God. And this is terrible for me. I went out, and I moved out from the kitchen, and I was standing up looking at everybody working, and I talked to myself, what am I doing here? I do not understand English. I do not understand what I have to do under pressures. When people are talking to me in this way and they do not have time to explain it, I do not like that, and I have a very bad feeling, and I said, no, I left this years ago...and I do not want to ...another time, I do not want, and I said, no, I am not coming back, and I do not want. And I am feeling lots of frustration. Trust me, Kate. I do not want. It's very hard for me, and at this point of my life, at sixty-three years old, I am not very old, but I do not want to have this feeling in my life, in this heart, I do not want. That's why I do not want to speak more English. I do not want, I want to go back. I want to go back. This is too much for me right now. (Second reflection)

Amy began to cry during the recording when she made this reflection. A slight from someone she did not know, but in a place where she had felt comfortable for many years, shook her out of her place of comfort and carried her into a space of isolation and rejection of her present situation. I could feel her exhaustion and her loneliness. During this and other reflections on this round, she repeatedly used my name in the recordings, as if I were there and she were talking to me. To me it felt that she wanted to unload the heavy weight of the solitude she had experienced during her almost thirteen years in this country, and this incident brought all of those

feelings to light. She repeats during the interviews that she does not have what she would call a real friend here in the United States, which may have meant that this recording was the only opportunity she had to talk about such a hurtful and isolating experience, one that minimized her as a person and relegated her to a marginal position in a place – her church – where she had felt welcome and, as she described in one interview, at peace. After listening to this recording, I felt awkward about our respective positions as research participant and researcher, rather than as friends, and I worried that I was perpetuating this cycle with her and felt almost that I was using her rather than giving her friendship. This continues to be a preoccupation as I write this.

Her reflections on social isolation hone in on her disconnectedness both from people here in America and from her family in her home country. Here she discusses her perception that people here interact with her mainly as a service provider and not as a true friend, and even when she feels close to them, they do not have space in their lives for her unless they need something:

They just need me, because they need something from me, but they don't invite me because they don't need me. This is something like this. Yes, and for me this is not a friendship. And that is happening to me here at least with three people. People who I love. That happen to me that I consider they are friends, but no. (Third interview)

Shortly after this interview, she elaborated on this thought, expressing how separate and isolated she feels from the people she knows in this country. She also uses this reflection to connect to a sense of belonging to a larger group, a group of others who also live away from their countries and apart from their families:

My life here is - I'm going to church, I'm going to work and back home. That's what I am doing right now...not funny at all. I am feeling very alone, I do not have my family, and if I can say that I have friends at the end of the week, they are with their families, they are

sharing with their families and no space for me anywhere, just stay here at home, or going to work, and this is too sad. This is saddest part to live out of your country, out of your family. (Second reflection)

She also remarks on the general lack of patience she encounters when she attempts to communicate with Americans, an alienating characteristic of conversation that adds to the sense of separateness from others. The theme of patience was one that I brought up as coming from another participant in the study, and Amy completely agreed:

This idea was exactly the one I wanted to record this morning, but I confused my mind, but I am completely agree with her, because there are many people who do not have patience to not understand. They do not have patience, the way we are talking and trying to understand, and that makes us feel, maybe this is not my place. (Third interview)

Amy's comments on her own ability to communicate in English betray her tendency to self-silence. To me her English is highly comprehensible with only an occasional hesitation when she encounters a new word. She criticizes her own accent, her ability to express herself to others, and her ability to connect with others because of her perceived English deficits. She shares, "I need to learn more English. My accent. Always I am thinking about my accent, because when I am hearing Spanish speakers, the accent is terrible. And I hear my accent is terrible." (First interview) In a reflection after the second interview, she echoes this self-silencing criticism of her language ability and records, "Hello Kate, I am apologize with you. I do not record anything because I hear myself and my English sounds terrible. I didn't understand myself, this is terrible." (Second reflection)

Shortly after, during a reflection, she takes the blame for her perceived inability to communicate: "Do you understand me, Kate? This is my problem. I understand everything, but I

cannot reproduce. It's my problem - not other ones, and that's made me feel extremely frustrated. I am feeling that way. I don't know what to do.” (First reflection) Despite her advanced level of English, her feelings of inadequacy in her ability to communicate permeate all of our discussions, and from her accounts, permeate her other relationships with English speakers in the United States, limiting her capacity to express herself and enter into relationships.

Shortly before our final interview, Amy repeated her frustrations with loneliness and with her English, stating that it is her lack of English fluency that leads to her lack of friendships in this country. Amy consistently takes the blame for her communication struggles and feels separate enough from other people here that she believes returning home is her only option:

One of my limits living here, it's a friendship. I do not have friends because it is almost - it is very difficult to understand each other, to understand the English, my English is terrible, I recognize that. And I am feeling sad, because I have been here for almost thirteen years, and I got involved with American people's things, since 2007, and my English is so poor, I feel lots of frustration, I don't know what else to do. The only thing is going back to my country... (Second reflection)

This segment more than any other shows how drastically Amy's feelings about her life here and her decision to return home to Colombia vacillated. Even within a single utterance she would state that she feels good as an immigrant here and that the people are mean to her and hurt her feelings. This section of quotes from Amy stands in stark contrast to all of her other contributions to the study; here she focuses on what she has grown to like about life here, what she finds comfortable, and what she fears losing when she returns to Colombia:

I have a good life here. I have work, I eat good, I have an old car, but this car is good for going everywhere I want to go. It's an old one, but it's working good. I am living in a

family house; I have my room. Nobody is taking anything from me, I am doing what I have to do in that house. (Second Interview)

I love to live here. I love the way I am doing everything when I take my car to go to my work and how the roads are, how the people is driving, how easy it is to go wherever it is I have to go. Everything here is easy and safe. You can leave your car without lock and when you're coming back, everything is in there. No problem. I like this. The only thing I don't like here is food. (Second reflection)

As an immigrant I am feeling good. I have a good feeling here, because people have been very nice to me, but once in a while when you go with some business, but this is just a little for me, the people is a kind of mean, but in my case, I am a very strong person, and I don't like to pay attention to these kinds of things. but if I tell you the truth it hurts your feelings, yes, I don't know. (Second reflection)

In the previous statement and the ones that follow, she demonstrates the conflicting feelings she holds about her situation here, expressing both an appreciation for what she has in her life and a frustration with the types of interactions she experiences here, primarily due to perceived language ability. These conflicting feelings are expressed in her reflections on her upcoming return to Colombia, which she begins to discuss here:

I love many things from here, lots of things I love from here, the people, especially, but I do not understand exactly how is here to be a friend. And maybe the difficulty for me is my English. I cannot express about myself, but I am always using the same words. I don't know how - what else I can do, what else I can say, but I really love the people here. I'm going to miss a lot my friends - the people here... I'm going to miss this too much. Now I

am back [to Colombia], soon, I don't know exactly when, but soon, and I am a little scared. (Second reflection)

Amy provides a couple of important reasons for returning to Colombia, including her exhaustion with her work here and her anxiety about retirement. The most pressing and important rationale, though, throughout the entire study, was her family, some of whom she has not yet met in person. She shares, "First of all, I am tired. But I have my grandchildren. I have my son. I just have one son, and I want to share with them, and there is not enough time to stay here. I want to go back." (First Interview)

In the second interview she talked more about her son's family and her relationship with them:

A: I have two grandchildren. and just one son. My grandchildren - nine and a half and eight.

K: Have you met them?

A: No. By internet. By phone. They know who I am, and once in a while they - they never call me. I call them. All the time. Even my son. He didn't call me. He's not calling me - never ever. I am calling him. Once in a while, he sends me a little message, "love you mommy." That's all. Maybe that happen to my son - he doesn't like to talk to anybody - to anybody. (Second interview)

Above she speaks about her son and her grandchildren similarly to how she described many of her personal relationships here in the States, as being lopsided. Later, though, in the same interview, she seems more confident about her son's regard for her and his need for her to return home:

And he's always - he wants me to go back, and I understand, it's like, you have your mom, but she's not alive because you cannot talk her, you cannot call her, you cannot kiss, you cannot spoil her, and he's very quiet, he didn't say anything, but I know that he needs me, and if I am back...that's going to be crazy. (Second interview)

Amy moved several times during the study between a strong frustration with her own sense of loneliness here and with a fear of encountering the same loneliness at home; her sense of connectedness to either place ebbed and flowed, even within a single interview. Overall, though, the impending move to Colombia diminished her enthusiasm and motivation for some of the activities she expressed enjoying in our first conversation and in her early reflections. First, for example, she shared that she no longer wanted to attend her church: “Every single Sunday I am at church. I love to be in the Bible study, too. I don't know what happened to me. I do not want to do lots of things.” (Second interview)

Her timeline for returning to Colombia became more concrete during the research study, and her sense of stuck-ness between her life here and her plans for her life at home became a more prevalent theme. In a later reflection, a lower-than-expected score in her English course deflated her motivation to continue working on her English language skills:

R, my teacher...when she calls me, oh, no, this is not a good score for me. 88, that means B. And I used to have A. I said, that shows that I am not on my top - it's like a dim moment. I do not want to learn anymore. It is something like that. I don't know if it is because I am tired or maybe because I am planning to go back forever to my country. (Second interview)

As the plan to return home became more real in her mind, she retreated from her interactions with others, especially those that required speaking English. Within this same

interview, she began to cry openly as she talked about her fear that, despite the isolation she expressed feeling here, she would find herself even more alone when she returned. She also feared that the kindness she had experienced with people here would not happen to her in Colombia:

After I came here, especially with American people, they want to do things for me, and in my country, nobody wants to do anything for me, and I said, oh my god, this is something rare, because I am always in the other side, helping, and now I am here, and they want to help me, and I don't know how to do this, I don't know how to receive help, I don't know how to ask for help. I don't know how to say that - when people want to help me, I don't know how to accept to receive because I am in the other side, and now I am back in Colombia, and I am thinking, am I going to be as I was before, thinking always about others and never thinking about me? It's like I deserve things, and maybe when I am back, I don't...do you understand? (Second interview)

Amy broke down into sobs during this statement and could not continue talking for a few minutes. I could see her complete exhaustion and anxiety about moving back to her home country, where she expressed that she felt she had been taken advantage of before moving to the United States. Her motivation for moving here was the result of three failed business ventures when she had given almost all of her savings and her professional livelihood and was left with what she perceived to be no other option than to relocate, something she feels again now regarding her level of social isolation. Aside from the company of her son and her grandchildren, whom she has yet to meet in person, her other motivations for returning to Colombia regard retirement and medical care. She does not have a legal status here that permits her to receive government benefits or social security, and she is worried about what will happen to her as she

grows older. Amy's tendency to reminisce about the secure aspects of her life here (e.g., her car and her comfortable home life) seem to reveal a fear of a potentially even more solitary life back in Colombia. She has her son, but in the first interview she shared that he never calls her; she always initiates phone calls. She refers to herself and lives as an independent person, but her solitude is wearing her out. Her expressed feeling that she feels she has no one to turn to and no one on whom she can depend, creates a chasm between her longing to go back to her home country to be around family and her fear that they, too, will disappoint her and leave her without any support in her older age.

Amy has been contemplating a move back home for over a decade now, and this has kept her from enacting any long-term plans here in the States, like saving to buy a home or investing in a long-term relationship; instead she is saving money for her retirement in Colombia. I felt a persistent sense of stuck-ness with Amy, as if when she came here, she stepped outside of herself and put the real "Amy" back in Colombia, the Amy that would have her family and her apartment and her friends. Here it feels like she's living in a shadow world, waiting for the opportunity to move back into her real life. This statement about her ability to move or progress here, reflects this perfectly: "Kate, it's becoming a jail for me. Richmond has become as a jail for me, because I am always here." (Interview three)

Amy's narrative swings like a pendulum between feelings of elation about going back home to Colombia and expressions of fierce appreciation for what she has in her life here. However, a particular incident (the rejection at the church while volunteering), along with the increased stress associated with the details of her move back to Colombia, sparked a decided shift in her narrative, pointing her trajectory away from participation in the activities she claimed to love, like Bible study, volunteering, and attending English class. It seemed as if, once she had

decided when she would return home, she also decided to withdraw from her life here, including anything to do with the English language, something she had struggled to improve since her arrival here over a decade ago. The decision seemed to spark a rejection of her trajectories toward fuller participation in her COPs, causing her to withdraw from other English speakers. She even began attending a Spanish-language church, something she had actively avoided doing before she made her decision to move home.

The most consistent theme throughout all of my interactions with Amy was her sense of social isolation, even though other participants in her class commented that she was always a bright spot in their interactions and a positive force of optimism when others around her were in need of support, a trait I could readily see for myself. She herself admitted that others have expressed this to her, and she said she loves to motivate and to help other people. Amy defines herself as a giver, one who has trouble receiving help from others, and this seems to contribute to her sense of social isolation and to her pervasive feeling that her relationships are based not on mutual affection but rather on an unequal service-oriented relationship where she provides a service, and the people who receive the service treat her like a friend or family only when she is needed. I feared that our research-based relationship was built on the same unequal footing, and I found myself in the second and third interviews focusing more on what she wanted to talk about rather than on my questions about identity and communities of practice. I did not want the interactions to leave her feeling even more isolated, as if all I was after was a good quote.

Jawad

When I visited a customer service training class at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to recruit for participants for this study, Jawad immediately responded that he thought this was important work and that he wanted soon-to-be refugees to know about the challenges of life

here that often run in contradiction to their expectations, and he said he hoped he could participate. Jawad is 36 years old and relocated to the United States from Afghanistan as a Special Immigration Visa (SIV) refugee only four months prior to the start of the study. The SIV is for individuals whose work with American government projects in their home countries has put their lives at risk, forcing them to leave in order to keep themselves and their families safe.

His recent relocation initially caused me to doubt his capacity to speak about successfully integrating into English-speaking COPs, but his lengthy professional experience with Americans in Afghanistan gave him perhaps more experience in that arena than participants who had lived here for much longer. At home, he had worked for an international bank and for non-profit organizations, including U.S. Aid, and recently had held several management positions. He spoke about his experiences interacting with a variety of English accents, including Scottish and Australians, which he identified as the most difficult varieties for him to understand. And he spoke about the stark contrasts he encountered between communicating with English speakers in his home country, which he found relatively easy, and communicating with native English speakers here in the United States, which he said is frustrating and very difficult. The difference was, he realized, that the burden of communication was on the English speakers who were in Afghanistan but is now entirely on the Afghans who are here as newcomers:

I actually had experience with English speakers in my home country. I had interactions with my manager for four years...she was from Australia...I understand everything she was saying, but now I understand that she really did it in the manner she was supposed to do with a foreigner. This was the difference, she spoke with us knowing that she had to take care of everything. She said something or some word that we understand and not something very native, very local. That is very important. They have to do it because they

were living in a foreign country, and they know there are cultural differences and preferences, but here these people don't have to do it. We have to do it. And it is hard to do it. (Third interview)

In Jawad's narrative he often spoke as a kind of spokesman for other SIVs from Afghanistan, using "we" and "they" to discuss the challenges they face as a result of the chasms between their expectations for life here and what they find in reality. He discussed several problems that he identified as prominent among newly arrived Afghan SIVs, in particular, finding a job in their fields of expertise. When he discussed employment, he occasionally abandoned the "we" or "they" and reverted to the "I". This topic was the most important to him during our interview sessions and seemed to be the one factor that most limited his capacity to think about and plan for his future here. Whenever he spoke about something that was particularly personally consuming, he used "I." Here he talks about how difficult the transition to living and working in the United States has been for him:

Actually, the challenges are the job. I have found. We are working here - I am not working in my area, and it's more physical. I'm not used to physical activity when I was in our country... ..it's only when you come here, you will find a lot of appointments. You are full of appointments. At least to three or four months, you'll get crazy. It's doctor appointment, for your wife, for your daughters, for yourself, with IRC, which is I think it is normal. We are supposed to have it because the system in the U.S. requires that, but we haven't anticipated while we were in Afghanistan, we have [to] study before - we have to have some preparation for this - some expectation for that. (First interview)

This vacillation between discussing his own personal situation and offering advice for how agencies that work with refugees can help alleviate some of the challenges was typical of

his discourse during the study. He used his own experiences to typify what he saw as common challenges faced by other SIVs in his situation. There was a theme in his narrative of wasted talent – not only of his but of the Afghan community as a whole – and of unrealistic expectations of what employment opportunities they would have when they arrived here in the United States. Before we had met, I had heard other Afghans in this community talk about refugees they knew who had returned to Afghanistan, a place that was no longer safe for them, because of this pressure. Jawad mentioned this same trend several times in the interviews:

I think, like me, many talented Afghan are here, they have a lot of expertise, but they are wondering how to reach those opportunities. They have to have some regular basic training for catching those opportunities, and they are doing some jobs which they're really not comfortable with, and that's really make them to be upset and leave the U.S. again and go again to the country that they escaped. (First interview)

Particularly in the first round of reflections, he spoke as a representative of his community, dedicating each recording to a specific challenge faced by his local SIV community: difficulty understanding spoken American English, especially regional accents; difficulty in recognizing informal speech and idioms; inadequate financial support from social services upon arrival; the challenge and stress of obtaining a driver's license; and the lack of access to social interactions with Americans. In his first reflection, he offered advice for agencies that work with refugees prior to their arrival in the United States to ease the burdens of misaligned expectations of life in this country:

My advice for the SIV which are coming here, they have time to talk in detail about living conditions, living situations in the United States. Talk a lot about the job. Talk a lot about the cultural aspect of the United States people. When they come to the United

States, they have sufficient information and actually they should be ready for those things they are supposed to face as newcomers. So, this is less likely to depress them... When they come with less preparation, they will face new things. They will face in every aspect of their life, they find new things, which is hard for them and finally they will feel that they are trapped in the United States, and this is bad decision that they have come and finally they will go with a depressed mind back to the country that they have escaped from. (First reflection)

Again he mentioned the trend of refugees returning to their country, one they had to leave for reasons of personal safety. The feeling of being trapped that he mentioned here expands beyond the employment challenge and pervades his comments on social isolation and his current incapacity to plan for his future in this country. In the second interview when asked about how often he interacts with Americans, he responded,

I haven't talked - I haven't found a person or a friend. In my neighborhood, in my job to start talking. Maybe I'm not a talkative person, it is possible that I am not so much. I am more with our Afghans, but with strangers, I feel that I have to be very careful with people. Maybe they don't want me to talk. That's why this sort of feeling avoid me to easily interact with people.

He explained that he has noticed this lack of social closeness in Western cultures, even in his interactions back in Afghanistan and felt that he did not know how to approach an American outside of an official capacity. He said, "I feel that we shouldn't do that in the very beginning, but maybe later if you find some friends you can." He spoke matter-of-factly about his impression that he could not initiate social interactions with Americans; however, it did frustrate

him in that he could not easily find people with whom to converse, so he could learn more about how to live here. He touched on this theme again later in the study.

When we discussed his goals for work and education, he expressed that he wanted to complete a bachelor's degree here in his field, accounting and finance, where he had worked for twelve years, but the issue of translating his past experience and credentials weighed heavily on the decision, and his current feeling of instability made planning for education seem abstract and untenable for the moment. In his professional trajectory, at the moment, he considers himself stuck, unable to progress until he can secure some amount of stability in the present:

I have completed a bachelor from one of the international associations. I'm just wondering whether to complete that one or start a new one. I have different certifications - I'm just confused - I'm just trying to find out the solution for that - and beside this I'm not stabilized here yet. I have a job and I want to find a good one... a number of things like that make me uncertain for my future so I do not have a stabilized - as soon as I get a good job... So this sort of things need to be solved first and so I could move ahead.

(Second interview)

He echoes this sentiment in the third interview when we talked about what kind of life he would like to see for himself and his family here. Here he seems to admit the idea of returning home to Afghanistan as a possibility:

I cannot reach my basic goal, like having a proper satisfying job here... How I could see in five years myself; how I could see in ten years my family and myself here. And as long as I cannot promote...I cannot prepare a better life. As long as I cannot see the trend in my life...As long as I cannot see this, it is hard to predict, and... if time passes and you cannot succeed, you are just returning to the very beginning point, I mean if one year or

one and a half year, you are still struggling with this situation, you have to think you should go back to your home. We are all human, okay. (Third interview)

Before making this statement, Jawad wrote in his second round of reflections that the difficulty in securing employment is prolific in his SIV community, and that the stress of the process leaves many seriously considering a return to Afghanistan. He was working to reconcile where he finds himself now with his professional identity and experience at home – the identity he had until he came here:

I regret for myself for all I had as background, I feel I should start something else here and say goodbye to my past and this is very hard for me...Some of our friends have a deeper obsession and always raise the decision for going back to Afghanistan, the rest has no other suggestion but to say, what will you do there? Where is there secure to go? We can survive here, but not there, at least for now being. (Second reflections)

In this statement he seemed both physically and emotionally stuck in his current situation, a situation where he feels he can survive but where life has become dire enough to begin to entertain the possibility of returning home to where his life was physically threatened. He talked about how he was going about the process of survival for himself here, and in this statement exclusively used the personal “I” instead of speaking for his SIV compatriots, perhaps in an effort to distance himself from his community’s discussions that raise the possibility of returning home. He seemed intent on convincing himself that he could make his life work here:

I'm trying to afford the moments, I'm trying to get a good job. I mean, a job that can respond to my current needs, so I could think without any of the stress for the future.

That's what I want now. I'm very desperate now. So, I am hopeful now. I am hopeful. I

see a lot of opportunity here exists, but it requires motivation and hard work to achieve that. It's a transition period. (Second interview)

Shortly after our second interview, Jawad left his job at a warehouse to pursue what he considered to be a better offer from a local call center. However, he decided to leave this new job after one week of training, feeling uncomfortable and foreign in the work environment. He described how he felt during the experience:

I have been in a two-week training, my classmates were all Americans...I felt myself as foreigner at the beginning as I don't understand much all their communication. They played some games at beginning of the day, mostly early morning. That was interesting, but I didn't know the role; after a couple of times I became familiar... The interesting matter in this point is that when I spoke to take part in class, everyone would turn their head to see who is he. I barely understand my tone of voice, and [my] accent indicates I am not an original American. That made me to feel myself stranger, and it was hard for some time, but I know this is a matter of fact. If someone in my country comes to a community, they felt same as I did...By the way, I understand as long as we are not able to speak in at least near to American accent, we will carry a sense of being stranger all the time. (Second reflections)

Before this moment, Jawad had not spoken of himself as a "stranger" or "foreigner" and had self-affiliated with his Afghan community. In the reflections about the job training experience, he expressed a sense of alienation that seemed to make him feel unrecognizable even to himself. His past experiences in a flourishing professional career in finance management were meaningless in his current situation; he was merely the man who did not speak fluent and unaccented English. Though, as became typical in my interactions with Jawad, he put a positive

spin on the experience, and in the third interview, he explained that this company had offered him a job that he considered more appropriate for native English speakers, one where he had to respond to phone calls (a challenging task in a secondary language) as his primary responsibility. He said it changed the way he felt about his marginalization from what he considered legitimate jobs, because this company decided to hire him, even knowing that he was not a native English speaker. The experience led to more questions for him about the challenges he was experiencing in securing a good job:

As long as I had no work experience in U.S., I think this is one of the reasons I'm being refused offers for something. It is a problem. At least I have to know, what is the process? I have all this expertise... So I want to know from which point I should start. Even if I have to work first as a volunteer, I am willing to do... what I am thinking... is why is the American people really feeling uncomfortable working with other people or especially with Afghans...? But why is that? So, what is the problem? I'm asking, still I'm asking, because I got a job in T... in a company. It's really changed somehow my approach, my questions, the company has offered me a job that usually an American should have to do this, because you are talking on the phone with Americans, and my accent is not American, and they know that. They have been very kind to me to offer me that job. It's a good action for that company, they at least trusted me and made me this offer. (Third interview)

In my interactions with Jawad this was the only moment he seemed unable to offer suggestions for how to improve his situation; he was at a loss as how to accomplish what he perceived was the one thing that would help him propel his life forward here: securing a good job. During the first two interviews, his belief was that his non-native-English speaker status was

the prime deterrent from securing better employment, but here he recognized that a company offered him a job – a job that depended on an ability to communicate easily in English - knowing that he was an English learner. Jawad was visibly exhausted in the third interview; he had been unemployed for nearly a month by the time we met. He had also just observed the holy month of Ramadan, which he admitted depleted his physical energy. Even though his experience here and his perception of the impenetrable stuck-ness of his own situation seemed overwhelming to me in this interview, he repeatedly returned to an awareness of the transitional nature of his life now.

In the first two interviews, Jawad had come across as someone who could organize his community to support one another, someone who was able to advocate for himself and for others. In the third interview, he seemed tired and at first reticent to answer questions with more than one- or two-word responses. I felt conflicted about asking him to elaborate, fearing that I was contributing to his sense of being beaten down by life here. By the middle of the interview, which lasted more than an hour (much longer than I thought it would, considering his level of exhaustion), he was talking easily about his experiences and much less as a representative of others in his situation. It felt as though he needed an opportunity to talk it out and perhaps to try to make sense of some of what he was going through. Before we left, he offered some final and more optimistic words:

Well, my experience here is not bad. I am seeing a new world, new people, I am just experiencing, everything is new for me here, okay? It is not bad. For example, even my English is being improved...I understand the American people; it's very good. I actually plan to write my whole experience, write all my experience as a book in my own language and give to my people, and say America is like this... It's worth it to stay. It's worth it to find new things in here. Still I am hopeful, still I am positive, thinking about

the U.S. I am not negative, okay, but in terms of job or in terms of new life, it is normal when you're going through something new. Every life has ups and downs.

And when I asked him if he had any final comments he wanted to make, I was relieved when he returned to his earlier role as a representative and an advocate of his community and finished by saying, "I just want you to reflect this to whoever will - to the United States, to the companies. It is to protect these SIV ...I am Afghan, I am just responding to my community...I appreciate ... that I had a voice to be taken considered. Thank you."

Participant Cases by Theme

The narratives of the remaining five participants each revolved primarily around specific themes related to the theoretical framework of identity negotiation and COP membership: Patricia's around re-aligning behaviors to fit in with perceived American social norms; Ohahni's on defense against discrimination; David's on a sense of stuck-ness between this country and home; John's on his responsibility for a large family and his stuck-ness in an overwhelming present situation; and Trevor's around his self-reliance and resourcefulness to reestablish himself in his new country.

Patricia

Patricia is twenty-nine years old and moved to the United States on a fiancé visa to marry her husband whom she met online. She is from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, has a university degree in hospitality and tourism, and worked professionally in her field, including work at the front desks at high-end international hotels in Rio. She has been in the United States for two years and has been working as a nanny for over a year after having searched for a number of other jobs. She lives in a suburban area and spoke often about the stark contrasts between life in a suburban apartment complex and her urban life in Rio, one of the largest cities in the world.

Patricia shared repeatedly that her expectations of life in America were far different than the reality she encountered when she moved here. Professionally, she assumed she would be able to use her education and experience to find a good job and live a life here that was more similar to her life in Brazil:

I thought that I didn't have to go back to school again, and get another diploma or another degree, but now I just think differently because probably I need to go back to school again and study something else, so it was kind of like this experience was kind of like was a big shock, maybe a big difference from what my plans were before I got here. And everything was completely different, so sometimes it makes you feel like this courage, sometimes it makes you feel like excited that you, it's a challenge, I think the older you get, it's harder to do everything over again. Because sometimes in our countries we have like, everything's already set, you have a good job, you live in a place, you have your place, and you have - you can pay your bills and everything, it's okay, but that was my life. And then I moved down here, and I was like, well, things are not going to be as easy as I thought. (Second interview)

She also repeatedly expressed her frustration with not being able to develop friendships with Americans here, something she also assumed she would be able to do, especially since her husband is American and would have social connections for her to build upon. In the first interview, in particular, she spoke about how uninterested anyone seemed to be in getting to know her. She also felt that she had nothing in common with anyone she met (i.e., common schools, friend groups, careers), and she felt she was both judged and discounted as a potential friend because of this lack of commonalities. The next two quotations come from the first and then second interview and express her frustration with the seeming shallowness of her social

interactions with Americans: “Why when I'm talking with an American, I can't keep it, I just feel so insecure. I feel like I don't have anything in common with them, and they don't seem to ask a lot.” (First interview) And, expressing her anxiety about a social gathering she had to attend later that day with her husband, she said,

It's the same thing when I go - today we have a house-warming and I know exactly how it's going to be because I don't know these people... Oh, so what do you do? Where do you live? And in Brazil, we don't talk about this...it sounds like if you have a really nice job, people get really interested about you, but if you don't have a nice job, people aren't really interested about talking to you. This is how I feel. Not that I'm ashamed about being a babysitter, but I feel that most people here that don't know me, they don't feel interested in talking to me, because I'm a babysitter from Brazil living in an apartment complex...So this is how I feel, so I know exactly how it's going to be. I'll put a big smile on my face. (Second interview)

Between the first and second interviews, she had begun to exercise twice a week with an American woman and talked about how nice it was to finally have someone to be with and talk with, but she also admitted that she changed her expectations for social interactions, aligning her conversational topics to those that interested her American acquaintance rather than sharing anything about her own life and experiences in Brazil:

I kind of talk like the same language, you know what I mean? Because I learned that I cannot force them to get interested about stuff, so I'm going to talk about what they're already interested about. I know that some people, women, they like to talk about shoes...and now I'm watching this tv show, and we don't only talk about, I mean we talk about other stuff, so I kind of ended up talking about what they want to hear. It's fine to

me, if they want to talk - they want to talk about their day - like anything really interesting happens - they want to talk about their day, and I'll talk about my day, yes....that's how it works. Different groups of people, I know that not everybody's like that, but in this case, I know that I can't force her to be interested about how was my life in Brazil...It's fine...it's what I tell people, non-American people, you cannot, if you move to a country, and you want to live in this country, you've got to adapt yourself sometimes, you cannot try to do everything - I would try to do everything that is Brazilian here - it's not going to work - not everybody's gonna be interested about us, so sometimes I need to try to do American stuff with American people. Sometimes I don't really want to - enjoy those things, but however, I need to, you know, I need to do it. I need to force myself. I need to try to - I cannot just give all my culture - you need to learn - it's way better - no, this is what I think people make some mistakes a lot here, they try to live the same way they used to live in their countries in another country, and I don't think they should do that. They should try to adapt a little bit. Not everything but you know, especially if you're trying to interact with Americans. (Second interview)

The interactions with her new American exercise partner seemed to improve her overall outlook on her life here; she was more upbeat and expressed less social isolation than at the first interview. However, she also seemed resigned to accept a lesser version of friendship than she had experienced back at home. Based on her experiences, she gives advice to others who are newcomers here that they should re-align their social behaviors to the interests of their American counterparts, rather than trying to share their cultures or their past experiences. Throughout the study, Patricia seemed to move more and more toward fuller integration into her life here, though in unexpected ways.

By the third interview, she had stopped meeting up with this new friend because of a change in her work schedule as a nanny, but she had also begun to drive for Uber during the weeknights to save money. She shared that the people she picked up generally seemed interested in her as a Brazilian, and she had many positive, shorter conversations with Americans as an Uber driver. She also shared that she had decided to return to school at the end of the summer to become a dental assistant, a decidedly different path than her Brazilian career in tourism, and that she and her husband had decided to move to a more urban section of the city, something she had wanted to do since moving here. When I left her after the third interview, she was much more optimistic and upbeat, and she seemed more in control of her life trajectories, both social and professional.

Ohahni

Ohahni is twenty-eight years old and moved to the United States from El Salvador when she was fifteen. She is a DACA recipient (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and completed her high school education in this country. She has earned several postsecondary credentials, including one for phlebotomy, and works at a large Amazon distribution center. She bought her own house one year before the interviews and lives there with her long-term boyfriend. She has an aunt and several cousins who also live in town, but they are not close; in fact, they are often in conflict.

The narratives from Ohahni's interviews and self-reflections center almost entirely on her capacity and her need to defend herself from both explicit and perceived discrimination. She enacts this self-defense in several ways. One is through her professed self-sufficiency and her volunteerism, as a model resident who does need support from others and goes out of her way to give what she can to those who have less:

... I get mad when people say we just came here to get all the government help. That's not true. I pay a lot of taxes and get no help, and I also give some of my time to the people who need it, and I also donate stuff to the clinic, because they have a lot of homeless patients that come that they don't have nothing to eat. They don't have toilet paper, toothpaste and all, so I do coupons, buy extra and I go and save, save, save, when I go and take some of the stuff that I have. I take and donate to them, and people in here, they don't do nothing like that. They are so selfish. (First interview)

Here and in other statements, she distinguishes herself from others, particularly Americans who, she claims, do not donate goods or time to others in need. She also works to distinguish herself from her own cousins who were born in this country through a determined self-sufficiency, particularly home ownership:

For me, mostly my motto is I don't like to get anything from nobody, so I'm going to show my own family that I can improve myself even though I wasn't born here, because my family ... my cousins were born here and that they can get anything, like all the help from the government, and I don't need that help, and I can get it on my own. (First interview)

More than any other kind of perceived discrimination, though, Ohahni was constantly discussing how she defends herself against overt racism at work and out in the community when she does her shopping. At work, she described incidents when she would respond to a racist comment with what she termed a "geography lesson," something she said she felt compelled to do often:

We get a lot of racist people, a lot of people who are really rude. Like one time this old lady she came to me - I was in the same aisle that she was working, and she said "Oh, I

hate Mexicans." And I laughed, and I look at her, and I said, well, you don't hate me. And she said, "what are you?" And I said, "I'm Salvadorian." ...just because we look and speak Spanish doesn't mean we're all Mexican...I had to explain to you - this is the map - look at the map. The United States doesn't cover the whole continent, and even Mexico belongs to North America, and I'm from America just like you are - I'm from Central America. You cannot call yourself American and I'm not American - you are from the United States. (First interview)

She mentioned specifically the stereotypes people project onto her about her heritage, namely her frustration at being labeled Mexican:

The first thing that comes up every time, they say they think you're Mexican. As soon as they see you and hear you speaking Spanish, they're like you're a little Mexican. They make me upset and mad and I explain them, I even give them a little history lesson. I get mad, you can't call every Spanish speaker a Mexican because that's not how it is. (Second interview)

She also discusses the perceived discrimination she experiences from other Spanish speakers, whom she said she avoids:

And also when my own people they get annoyed about - some people they go to the Spanish store and they get annoyed that I don't speak Spanish, and I'm like you all don't have to expect all the people to speak Spanish because we are the ones are in this country, we are the ones who have to learn how to speak their language because if they go to our country, we expect them to speak our language. It's just equal you know. And they get mad at me because I think that way. They say, you are like on their side. You should be on our side, and I say no, it's how I have to be. Maybe because I finished growing up

here, I have a different way of thinking to my people, and they get mad at me because I think different than they do. (Second interview)

In this quote, she distances herself from other Spanish speakers explaining that the time she spent “growing up here” made her different from them. In other instances, she distances herself from Americans by pointing to their rudeness or lack of volunteerism. During the interviews, I felt that Ohahni was constantly on the defensive, even occasionally looking for reasons to be offended. There were consistent references throughout the three months to “rude looks” and having to talk to store managers about discriminatory service. Her interactions with others could best be characterized as self-advocacy and self-defense through language.

In the third interview, however, she seemed much more comfortable with me and spoke very personally about her own life and what she wanted, which, more than anything at this time was to be a mother. We had a friendly rapport from the beginning of the first interview, but this meeting felt different, and I had a glimpse of a different Ohahni that seemed to hide behind many lines of defense. Considering the stories she shared of the hostile racism she experienced in her high school here to the seemingly constant barrage of openly racist comments from co-workers, the thick exterior makes sense. Her reaction to this story about her boyfriend’s hunting friends, in particular, showed me how complicated her interactions here are on a daily basis:

My boyfriend he interacts with a lot of rednecks at work - because sometimes he calls me and brings me their meat - and I'm like, who gave you that? "My friends, they went hunting." And sometimes they invite him and also say that we'd love to take you with us, but at the same time we can't, because in our community there are a lot of people who are really racist, and they will shoot you like you are a deer, and they will use an excuse for

that because it has happened before...But it's good that they are being honest with him, and tell him it has happened before because they would not like him. (Second interview)

I was horrified by the story; she merely laughed about it, thankful that they had warned her boyfriend instead of taking him along for a potentially lethal ride. Whereas I felt offended for both her and her boyfriend, and I felt shocked that his peers could maintain friendships with people whose racism tended toward the violent while also claiming to be his friend, Ohahni shrugged this off as just another thing they had to deal with as part of their normal lives. Upon expressing my horror, she responded matter-of-factly,

Because you are not like that, and you are probably surrounded by people who think like you do. And because you are white, you've probably never felt the hate that people have against you, but when you are a different skin color, you feel it. (Third interview)

There was no resentment directed toward me in this statement; it was to her a simple fact. This is her daily life, and whether the discrimination is explicit, overt, perceived, or subtle, it has woven itself into her identity, making her, as she said her boyfriend sometimes calls her, “mean” for the sake of defending herself and retaining her pride.

David

David is forty-two and moved to the United States just over seven years ago from El Salvador. He is the only of the participants who operates primarily in his home language group both socially and professionally. All of his co-workers are from Venezuela and speak Spanish, and these men also constitute his social group. He works in construction here in the United States and worked in an office for an airline at home in El Salvador. He lives here with his sister and her children, but he shared that, because he does not know whether he will stay or return home, he does not make plans for his future, plans like saving for a home or going back to school. He

did share that if he met a girl, maybe he would plan to stay. He does, however, strive to learn more English and attends English language classes. He even joined a local chapter of Toastmasters to gain practice speaking publicly in English. His interest in English-learning seems more intellectual than practical. He reads novels to learn more, and when we first met, he was finishing *The Invisible Man* and wanted to discuss it during our second meeting where he shared that he had begun to read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, not the usual choices for English-learning texts.

David did not talk often or in detail about his life in El Salvador; nor did he share much about what his life is like here. He spoke more about his ideas and how things felt, rather than how or with whom he spends his time. I asked him if he wanted to stay here or wanted to return home, and his answer revealed that he has been vacillating between staying here and returning home since he arrived:

I think the first days or weeks, sometimes you try to be there - and you can't - in your country - I talk with people and they tell me the same - sometimes they feel that they want the other thing - to go back - mostly when they have problems. But I don't feel that because I - I feel that but the thing that I say - in two years I am coming back - but I didn't do it - everybody tell me the same, too...I talk with my family maybe every week - maybe every three days by Skype, so I know about the situation there - and they tell me about the challenges, and I say, no, I better not return yet, but in some ways I have been thinking that - that I might go back. (First interview)

When I asked David about his goals for his future here, his response echoed that same theme of being stuck between places, unable to make plans:

No, no. It's the reason I drive my old car. Because I cannot make a decision to get a good car, because it's the same with the plans, because people who make plans, who don't think about returning - they plan to buy a car to buy a house, but I don't have those plans right now. (Second interview)

David left town for a job after this interview, and we did not meet for a third time. One of the reasons he said he was staying in the United States was that back at home people were so preoccupied with the violence and economic instability of their country that they did not have the energy to do or talk about other things, and he wanted to be able to talk about ideas and about books. He seemed like someone who would much prefer to listen to others rather than to talk about himself, and, perhaps because of this, our sessions were more conversational than transactional. We did talk about ideas and books. He saw himself in *The Invisible Man* to some extent; he told me that one line, in particular – “the blood and the skin don't think” – was to him profound. He said he believed that in a short time skin color would not matter, that everyone would become more or less the same. David never explicitly addressed perceived discrimination, but one statement revealed that he felt that others definitely held their whiteness over him and judged him to be less because of his darker skin:

I choose - I have that determination to not to focus on people...and I am not less than those people, and sometimes they feel better than us. I don't care if they are white, but it's not everything. And I think the world is changing- I think the color is not going to be the determiner. (Second interview)

His defense against this kind of discrimination was a choice to focus elsewhere and to imagine a world where color was not a determiner of social status. This was the only instance when he spoke about having experienced any kind of discrimination. Instead of focusing on what

he does in those situations, he spoke about the idea of color-based discrimination and how eventually – sooner rather than later, he said – it would become an obsolete means of judgement.

John

John is an SIV refugee from Afghanistan who moved to this country eight months prior to the interviews with his wife and their five children. He had extensive experience back home with data management systems and has an advanced degree. Here he is currently driving valet for a university, and his wife is working at a McDonald's franchise. John had very little interaction with English speakers outside of his work, and language acquisition was his main goal, though he lamented that, between a heavy work schedule and driving his large family to all of their appointments, he had trouble finding the time to take classes.

The themes of John's narrative focused primarily on his family and his hope for them in this country. He also expressed very serious concerns about his wife's transition here: "... my wife is sometimes sick. She has stomach problems... You know, some people who came here... you see that they are going to mental doctor, like my wife was - she's had three or four times appointment with the mental doctor - it's a big problem." (First interview) His wife, like many of the Afghan refugee wives, had not worked outside of the home prior to coming here, and she was having difficulty with the new work expectations. She was also frustrated at her lack of opportunity to devote time to learning English.

John spoke often about how impatient native English speakers here were with him, even refusing to speak more slowly when he would ask. He repeated the idea that if he had stronger English, then everything would fall into place. He talked about how difficult it was to live here; however, more than that, he talked about how well his children were doing here, and about how happy he was for them:

Why I'm happy? Because I know not for myself I'm happy for my family. So there - my children - they are very happy - so they go to school. It's very different school in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, sometimes they cannot find chairs, so they sit in the school. Sometimes they are fighting together - the students - it's out of control. So, they're very happy. We see the very kindly teacher and administration and the staff of the school - they are very kindly. A month ago, I went to the school - a celebration of the culture. Every people - every country they must make food of their country. I made my country's special food, and we meet a lot of people, and I feel that every teacher real loves their students, and - I was very happy... They learn at school. My son and daughter, they are ninth grade in high school. After the sixth month, they can - my daughter is every score is A+ then I meet their school teachers. They were very happy about my son and daughter, and I am very happy because I like my children to grow up and find a good life. It's why I came and one of my goals in life. (First interview)

At the end of the second interview, he mentioned his decision to take a second job delivering pizzas. His wife had not yet been able to pass the driving test, and he spoke about the exhaustion of being the sole driver for a family of seven. John's exhaustion was palpable during the two interviews, but so was his happiness and hope for his children. His story is one of hope but also one of seemingly insurmountable obstacles to attaining any level of comfort that would help him succeed. Any future-oriented comments he made were about his children and their chances for a better life here; all comments about his own experiences here resided solidly in the present and how he could not seem to find his way through the many obstacles, language-learning being the primary one, that precluded any future-oriented planning for his own life here.

He participated in the first and second interviews, and was responsive to all of my reminder messages, but he did not respond to my messages about meeting a third time, nor did he respond to a message I later sent asking him if he and his family were okay. The silence may have been a simple matter of a new phone number or a changed work schedule, but I am worried it is more.

Trevor

Trevor and I only met for one interview. Shortly after our meeting, he left his job as a valet driver for a full-time position in his field of data management and could not continue with the study because of his new schedule. During our interview, Trevor self-identified as motivated and as a problem-solver. He is thirty years old and moved here as an SIV from Afghanistan. He is socially connected to the Afghan community here and has also sought out professional groups to help him advance in his career. He joined a meet-up group of Sequel Server Database Administrators to learn more about the field here, and he provided several examples of how he searched for information to help him translate his past experiences and education into his new American context. For example, he talked about how he prepared for an interview by Googling common interview questions and asking his English teachers to help him prepare:

...the interview was good because I - before going to interview I prepared myself for the interview...I took all those common interview questions and shared them with both my teachers and got the comment of both teachers and combined them and made them one...It helped me a lot, and the interview went very well...I went to Google and searched common interview questions - they're all the same. I was a little nervous, but in general it was really good interview. I really impressed them. I hope to hear good things.

He also, to make sure he was filling out his tax forms correctly, directly called the IRS, something I have never considered doing myself. While many of the participants expressed a hesitance to initiate interactions with other Americans, Trevor seemed completely unencumbered by any doubts or anxiety about his capacity and his right to get information and resources he needed from the people who seemed most capable of providing him with them:

Even if I have a question about the apartment, and the W-4 in the taxes, I searched a lot in the internet and lastly, I ... called the IRS - I called them and asked them how should I fill this, and they told me this is how you should do this. I was curious about that and I wanted to make sure what I was doing was correct. And I don't want to get in trouble in the future.

He self-identified as a problem solver, not only for his own problems, but also for others in his community:

Well, we also have some Afghans here, so I started making friends with them, because I am very someone who is more finding a solution to problems, a problem-solver, so when I came here, I look after - if there's anything, for example, I should go to DMV, how should I go, so I just searched all over the internet and found the process. I just figure it out.

My impression was that Trevor encountered none of the issues of access to communities that characterized the other narratives. His assumption was that, if he approached someone for help, he would get it. While I found Trevor's interview interesting and impressive, I did not know if he could speak well to the process of gaining access to COPs or to working toward legitimacy, mainly because, in his mind, he already had membership and legitimacy wherever he went. It is an enviable position and one that others commented they wished they could achieve.

Trevor's interview was my first of this study, and I was briefly concerned that I would need to drastically change my focus if the others proved to have similar stories to tell. I had the impression that if I asked about perceived discrimination or feelings of isolation, I would have met with incredulity or flat denial. The only difficulty he admitted to experiencing here concerned his case worker when he first arrived, but, after reaching out, a friend from Afghanistan who lived in the United States gifted him his car, and those problems seemed to be solved. It should be noted that Trevor's goals for interaction were entirely professional; he seemed content with the friends he had made in his Afghan community here and was not isolated from others with whom he could interact on an equal footing. Even with that in mind, Trevor's interview reads like a how-to guide for newcomers to this country: be confident, ask questions, find groups of people who can help you, acquire the resources you need to be successful, and become involved in your community. From all of the other interviews in the study, it is apparent that these are all difficult tasks to accomplish; they require a belief that nothing will go wrong if you do not want it to and that everything can work out for the better.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The driving question of this research concerns how adult English language learners negotiate identities within and between their COPs. An examination of the individual cases points to temporal and situational structures that twist and bend depending on a range of

intersecting variables that exist across time: experiences from the past, current events, and future aspirations. To answer this question, though, it is important to answer a series of sub-questions: first, what are adult ELLs' perceived COPs; what are their perceptions of themselves as English learners and speakers; how do their patterns of participation fluctuate between their COPs; and how do their participation patterns align with those perceptions? Below I address each of these questions using the narratives themselves to demonstrate how identities and COP memberships intersect and inform one another.

To set the context for the analysis of the data in response to the study's research questions, I want to revisit Wenger's (1998) dimensions of COPs, especially as they interact and influence a member's participation from one community to another. He writes that "the notion of practice refers to a level of social structure that reflects shared learning" (p. 125), meaning that in order for members of a COP to be legitimate members, they must share the social practices of that COP. He goes on to list twelve indicators that a COP has formed, and several of these have particular relevance to the identities, social structures, and patterns of communication that uniquely impact the experiences of English learners: "sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual"; the "rapid flow of information"; "overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs"; "mutually defining identities"; and "jargon and shortcuts to communication" (p. 125). The dimensions Wenger lists all require some level of identity shifting and mutual identification revolving around communication. While there is evidence that the participants in this study have achieved some level of intermittently legitimate membership in COPs, much of their narratives orbit around themes of otherness or silencing that stymie their trajectories toward fuller participation, and they all perceive language to be the sole barrier.

In conjunction with the challenges of legitimate COP membership, I also want to revisit Norton's explanations of identity negotiation in adult ELLs as a foundation upon which to build the examples that follow. Wenger's work explicitly acknowledges that "the formation of a COP is also the negotiation of identities" (p. 149), and Norton (2013) focuses her work on the identity negotiation that occurs specifically in the realm of language learning within the context of the target language. She argues that ELLs' investments in learning the target language in their communities are "co-constructed in their interactions with their native speaker peers" and she describes identity as "a site of struggle" (p. 7), a place of tension between conflicting versions of self.

In both Wenger's and Norton's work, their focus is on behavior regarding membership in a specific COP. This study expands that understanding by approaching the adult learner, and not the COP, as the nexus of interaction. The excerpts of the narratives reveal that each of the participating ELLs carries with them the experiences, subsequent reactions, and lingering self-perceptions that arise from the intersections of their COPs, their investments in membership to each COP, and their interactions with others whom they perceive to be legitimate members of each COP. So, to answer the question of how their identities are negotiated between their COPs, first we explore what they perceived to be their COPs, both real and desired.

What do adult ELLs perceive to be their COPs?

Figure 5 below shows a network of COPs to which the participants claimed some level of membership. The COPs within the red ovals and rectangle are those in which English was the primary language of interaction. Of all of the COPs included in the map, only three represent COPs for which English-language acquisition was the primary rationale for membership: Toastmasters, a meet-up group, and an English-language class. The study itself, participants'

work environments, and two participants' churches served as the other primarily English-speaking COPs; all others were communities in which their languages of origin were primarily spoken. As I will discuss later in the chapter and then more fully in chapter six access to COPs where English was the primary language was stymied by a range of factors, including available time and perceived bias against ELLs.

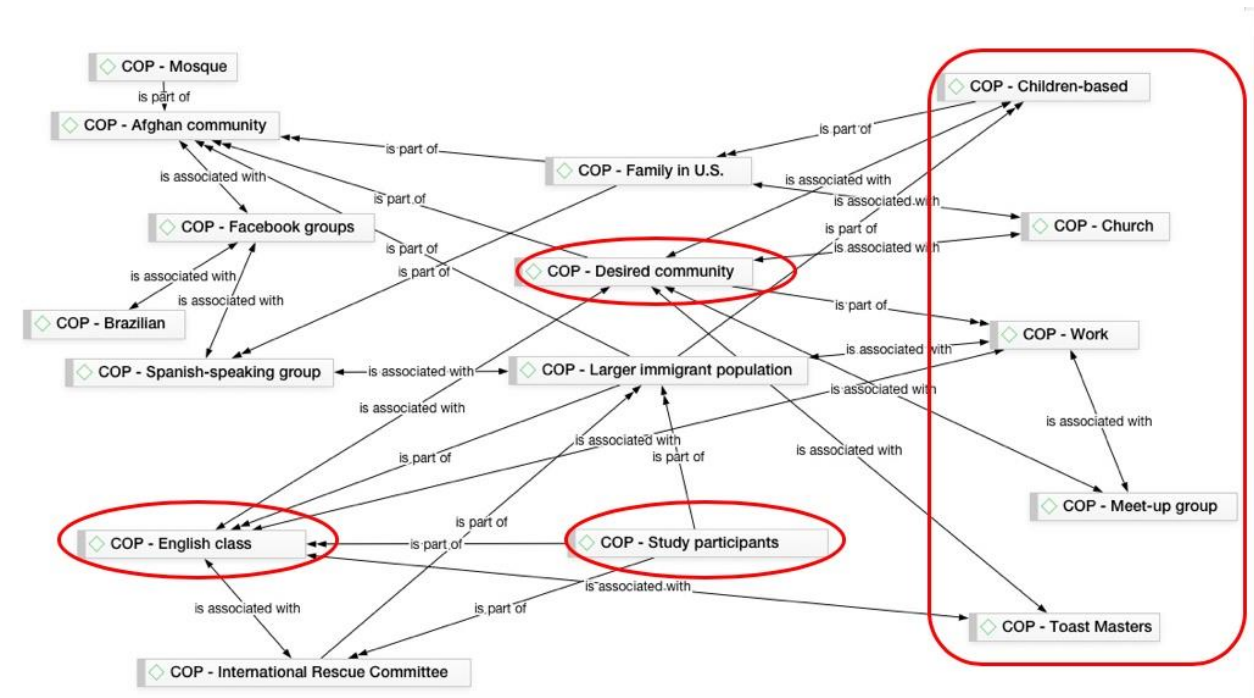


Figure 5. Map of COP connections

Research study as COP. The research study itself in some capacities served as a kind of asynchronous COP wherein the participants experienced legitimate participation as co-constructors and co-interpreters of the data of this study. They also, through member checking and the hermeneutic practice that characterized the study design, were exposed to and incorporated others' ideas about ELLs' experiences in the United States into their own narratives. In this way, their knowledge of the broad experiences of immigrants expanded and grew over time, as did their ability to discuss the themes and ideas presented by the other

participants. Additionally, their interactions with me, an English-speaker, changed significantly between the first to the third interviews. As a group they became more vocal and seemed more confident as they expressed their reactions to the ideas I presented and as they shared their stories. Maria, for example, who expressed a fear of initiating interactions with English speakers, spoke at length and with emotion during the third interview about how she felt her fellow English-language classmates were unjustly overlooked as valuable assets in their communities because of their English skills. She ended our last interview by remarking that “it was interesting that I could be helpful.” Jawad also commented that “it was good to have a voice to be heard.”

While the research space may or may not have constituted an actual COP for participants, it did lead to an increased level of LPP wherein all of the participants who continued on to the third interview exhibited a greater comfort in speaking, challenging, and elaborating on responses while, during the first interviews, they were much less likely to contribute additional information beyond the confines of the interview questions. At least within the research paradigm, they engaged in situational learning through an increased awareness of others’ similar struggles and heightened confidence in engaging with an English speaker about their situations and perceptions of their lives as immigrants.

Intentional spaces. The first category of COPs I will discuss are what I am terming “intentional COPs,” communities to which the participants sought and gained membership for the purpose of learning more English. As an example, David, who works construction jobs, joined Toastmasters to improve his English but also because he was interested in learning how to improve his public speaking:

When I came here, I was trying to improve my English, so I was thinking about ways to improve it, so I wanted to be in touch with people, so I thought about how to talk in front

of people - I don't remember exactly what I was thinking at the time, but I started searching, and I found where to learn to speak in front of ... Sometimes I feel nervous, but most of the time I feel okay. I remember one speech, it was the guy for the first time took picture of the snow - you know the figure - everyone is different - you can imagine billions and billions - the shapes they are different. I had to prepare a speech for seven minutes - they give me feedback, for example, if I made a mistake or I pronounce a word - then about the methodology - maybe I did my ending - it wasn't good. But another time the ending wasn't good, and somebody told me, and somebody told me that you should really improve the ending -they focus on the content - it's really great, Toastmasters.

The focus on interaction in this COP was language itself, however, not on a perceived English-language deficit, but rather on improving the structure of a public speech. As another example of membership in an intentional COP, Trevor, an Afghan refugee who worked in data management at home and, at the time of his interview, drove valet for a university, joined a data management meet-up group to both improve his English language skills and to learn more about his professional field worked in this country.

The other intentional COP shared by five of the participants was an English-language class that met twice a week. This COP is set apart from the previous two in that the focus here was on English-language acquisition and not another content-oriented goal. Another distinction is that all of its members are ELLs, but the community formed here provided support that went beyond language acquisition. It also gave its members a sense of connectedness and belonging that they expressed they did not feel in spaces shared with native English speakers. A sense of a cohesive group of immigrants that spanned beyond the classroom was apparent in many of the conversations we had about the English class. When I spoke with Amy, she mentioned having

met with Maria and commented on Maria's painting award, something Maria called "her little achievement". Amy commented, "this is something for foreign people. We need that. For example, in her case, she doesn't have her mom or her sister. No one is here from her family. We need somebody, and I like to be that person...but once in a while it's a little hard to understand each other." Amy, in particular, expressed her desire to help others in her class, identifying with Maria's need for recognition and support, especially as an immigrant who is disconnected from the support networks she had at home.

For Maria, the English class helped her open her mind to different kinds of people with whom she had never had contact, and she realized she was a part of a larger group, one comprised of immigrants who felt out of place here and unable to be recognized as the people they are, the people they knew themselves to be at home where they spoke the majority language and were able to more easily secure jobs where they felt they were respected. She also went further to emphasize the unrecognized importance and potential of the people she has met as an immigrant here. This theme of a larger self-identification with the immigrant community emerged in several of the narratives and will be explored later in the chapter. Maria spoke of the potential and value of her classmates, connecting them all to the larger immigrant community: "Maybe they can't express themselves because of lack of English, but I see how they are different, they like to read, yes, maybe they are close-minded like me because they are from different countries not from the United States, but still, so immigrants is the future of this country."

Patricia, who is from Brazil and is married to an American here, echoed Maria's sense of connectedness to and support from the other ELLs in the English class. For her the class was a source of much needed social interaction, a place where the issues of patience and perceived bias

were not a part of her everyday participation. The class was a space where she could share her experiences with others who shared a visceral understanding of what she was going through, something that she expressed she did not encounter with Americans. She commented,

A good thing about the class is that you have people from other cultures, we are trying to do the same thing. We are trying to learn English, so we are there for the same purpose, and we have a kind of, we're passing through the same experiences, like you know, kind of the same ones. So, it's good because you have people who share things and it's kind of everybody it's kind of a little bit going through the same things that you are - but they are different from you because they came from other countries, they have different cultures, different way of thinking, and different personalities, of course. So, I enjoy it more - I go to my English more to do the interactions than to learn, because I'm really going to be around them to be able to talk and share.

All of the participants in the study belonged to at least one intentional COP, though their participation was not always consistent, and they also all belonged to at least one institutional COP, a space they were compelled to frequent because of activities related to income, faith, or the need for other kinds of resources. These were primarily work spaces, their children's schools, churches or mosques, volunteer opportunities, and an additional and unanticipated COP category which appeared in the virtual sphere.

Work spaces. An abiding commonality of all the work experience narratives was some level of regular exclusion from interactions with English speakers. At the far end of the spectrum was David, who, when asked about his English-language interactions at work, answered that his workplace is almost entirely Spanish-speaking; however, he claims that some English

interactions are limited to asking for things they need to do their work, and he actively avoids interacting with other English speakers whom he considers less educated:

Because my co-workers are Spanish, and there are some people, some other guys from other companies, electricians, or people from the air conditioning - they don't usually talk, only when they need something, or we need something, we have to ask. Usually they only say hi. They speak different, not very educated, so to be honest, I don't like to ask them things, talk with those people.

My impression from our interview sessions is that David, who loves to discuss ideas and books, does not want to interact with English speakers whose lifestyles and conversations would not reflect his values or level of education, even if it would improve his capacity to communicate more fluently in English. He never expressed any sense of comradery with his fellow workers, though they comprise the majority of his social group here, and, in contrast to the narratives of the Afghan refugees who participated in the study, he did not attempt or express a desire to advocate for himself at his workplace. David's work permit limits his capacity to receive social benefits or to move from job to job easily, and his comments on his workplace reflected, to me, the limitations imposed on him by his type of legal status, limitations that compelled him to remain more silent in his interactions with others.

Jawad, an Afghan refugee who worked in a warehouse at the time of this interview, expressed a strong sense of belonging with his Afghan co-workers, and he regularly expressed a desire to advocate for his group of friends at work. In tension with his desire to advocate, the following comment shows the silencing practices at play in his COP. He also expresses an understanding that these silencing practices are, in a sense, dehumanizing acts that otherize him and his Afghan co-workers:

And also, when you are in the job - a group of us which are from Afghanistan, which surround eight to ten people, we are working in the Vitamin shop and occasionally during the day we met at some point and start chatting and we are working at the same time, but we are talking. Several times our supervisor say, please don't talk. Why you people talk so much? And we are questioning him, oh my god, why not? Why not? We are doing our job, and also at the same time we are talking. If we don't talk, we will burst. Being so quiet during the day for ten to twelve hours, it's very exhausting.

The phrase uttered by the supervisor, “why you people talk so much?” explicitly otherizes the group. Jawad’s experiences with otherizing in the workplace heightened when he took a new job at a call center after our second interview. In this instance, he was offered a job that he considered superior and was excited to enter into a field that was a little closer to what he was familiar with back home, but the strain of the “strangeness” he expressed feeling during their two-week introductory training class pushed him to quit the job:

The people were friendly, they were so friendly, but as long as you cannot interact like them, you will feel strange, and that will annoy you. Okay? Yeah, they were so nice but a lot of things you have to learn, a lot of things you have to do with these people to understand. It requires time, I think. It's uncomfortable sometimes. On that class I didn't find one person to be like me, at least I could tolerate that, or I could sustain that... I can say, the work environment is something that I feel not comfortable with...that's why I gave up.

Children’s schools. Two of the participants spoke about their interactions with their children’s schools. For John, who has five children, he says that these interactions are important for his goal of helping his children find fuller lives here in the United States, and that he always

feels welcomed and satisfied with his conversations with his children's teachers. Here he talks about a cultural celebration event at one of their schools and discusses his concerns about his educational goals for his kids, especially the two eldest:

A month ago, I went to the school - a celebration of the culture. ... I made my country's special food, and we meet a lot of people, and I feel that every teacher really loves their students, and - I was very happy...I went then because it's very important for me ... and I went to meet their teachers - and I told you before, my goal is for my children.

This particular statement stood out to me, because it was one of the only statements from John that demonstrated any feeling of being valued by a group of American English speakers (he also shared that he and his supervisor have a good relationship). John has a strong accent and occasionally searches for words, and he characterized many of his interactions as cut short, rushed, or dismissed. As a father of five who expresses a lot of concern and caring for what happens to his children's lives, the positive nature of these school-related interactions seemed to override many of the other slights and setbacks he experienced in the professional part of his life in the United States.

Faith-based spaces. A church or mosque was another COP to which five of the participants felt they belonged here in the United States, and the two who attended churches elected to join English-speaking churches. The three Afghan participants all went to their mosques regularly and shared that it provided a strong source of community, as well as a link to their home country, culture, and sense of wellbeing. They also shared that it was an important outlet for their wives, many of whom have fewer interactions with others outside the home and who are still learning English, serving as an opportunity to talk with others about similar experiences.

For the two who considered church to be an important COP, Patricia characterized church as a safe space to interact with Americans where she could socialize, something she felt she needed to do more often. Amy, who is Colombian, emphatically told me that there were only three Spanish-speaking families who attended her Baptist church. She had searched for a church where she could meet Americans and improve her English while praying and learning about God, two things she said she loved to do. She used her church as a means to establish a sense of connectedness and belonging with others: she participated in Bible study every Sunday and volunteered with several of the church's causes on a regular basis, resulting in some informal friendships. For those who attended church or the mosque, it was a more present-oriented COP than the intentional or work-related spaces, which tended to be more future-life-oriented; the goals associated with their participation in these faith-based spaces were rooted in current needs for faith and connectedness to other people who shared a similar purpose.

As discussed in the case studies, Amy's sense of connectedness was – it seems – shattered around the time of our third interview by a dismissive comment while she was volunteering at a church dinner. Her investment in this COP disappeared by our third interview, and she had found another church, one that was Spanish-speaking, a group characteristic she shared in the first and second interviews that she actively avoided. This was also about the time she shared that she did not want to study English anymore. This one act of dismissal seemed like a catalyst that broke Amy's motivation to belong to a group she had before claimed to love, and it also seemed to spur a resentment toward English-learning (including an expressed refusal to return to English class) as well as interacting with her English-speaking acquaintances, thus isolating her socially from many that she had grown to care about during her time here.

Volunteer opportunities. Amy regularly volunteered at her church, which provided her with opportunities for legitimate participation with other English speakers. She developed friendships through these volunteer spaces and expressed that she found joy in doing this kind of work. Ohahni is another participant who actively volunteers and expresses a very different kind of reaction to her interactions with English speakers within her volunteer opportunities than in her other COPs. She volunteers at a courthouse as a translator and at a clinic helping to prepare patients. She comments that the people who work at those two establishments are kind to her, curious about her life and culture, and treat her with respect, encouraging her to pursue further education and training. In all other aspects of her work and social life, she describes interactions with English speakers as tense and disparaging. These spaces, spaces based on a common activity that was separate from language-learning, provided Amy and Ohahni with communities in which they could act out more of their potential as contributors and participate in a legitimate way with other English speakers.

Virtual spaces. An unanticipated but unsurprising set of valuable COPs that emerged occurred in the virtual sphere. Jawad shared with me that they have a Facebook group especially targeted toward Afghans living in Richmond that exists to help newcomers problem-solve with the help of others who have either been here longer or who have access to different resources. He describes the group:

...we have a group on Facebook with more than 150 who are living in Richmond, they are connected in that group, they just say, "I have this trouble, I want to ask this, I have this difficulty" - everyone is here puts their idea and calls that person, "oh, you have trouble" - any kind of problems they have, we help each other, we guide each other, in terms of everything, in terms of money, in terms of transportation - everything, we can

reach each other... Many times I had a question, I have it written into that group, and I received a guidance from them. You can find some people who are staying here around twenty years ago, they know every aspect of the United States and the systems.

A similar Facebook group seems to exist for Spanish speakers in the Richmond area, though Ohahni, who shared this with me, sees less value in it than Jawad saw in his Afghan group:

We have - they call it like a "flea market" online for the Spanish community, and they sell stuff, but they also do like "where can I find this? or where can I go to buy this? or like you guys know about any jobs around this area?" They call it the flea market. ... Sometimes it's helpful - sometimes they are so rude to me, and I'm like whatever.

Both of these online groups serve many of the purposes of a COP in that they provide space for newcomers to learn about living in this country from old-timers who participate in a mentoring and supportive way. It was a space, too, where they were able to ask questions without the fear of bias or dismissal. Virtual spaces also served as a way to connect to potential social COPs. Patricia told me that she used Facebook as a way to find other Brazilians when she first moved here:

...it's really hard to meet people here, so I wanted to go - I was like at home by myself thinking how can I meet people, how I can I know where they are? And there is a Brazilian restaurant here, and I went on their Facebook page, and I start looking for people, and I start messaging these people. It's kind of weird, but it was the only way I found that I could be able to know people, because...and then I start messaging these people, and I was trying to look for people around my age... I got a few responses, a few

replied, that's how I met those people, and it's good, because since I met them, they know what's going on in the Brazilian community here.

Social groups. Concerning social COPs, close social relationships with U.S.-born Americans were rare, many relationships with Americans revolved around their children, and all of them found socializing with international groups of people easier (Ohahni, in particular, sought out international rather than American social groups at work.). Amy, Maria, and Patricia spoke about having an American friend, but the friendships seemed limited by either difficulties in communication or a lack of mutual cultural understandings. Amy's friend was a man she met at her first job in Richmond in a bakery, and he helps her with English homework, and they continue to talk socially. While he does not seem like what she would characterize as a close friend, he does provide a social connection and, I think, is an example for her of a person who wants to help her, something she fears she will not have when she returns to Colombia. Maria's friend is a fellow mother whom she meets during the day, and they sometimes discuss politics (which Maria once said she wished she would not, because she feels like she cannot defend her country well enough in English to engage in the conversation). It is the only regular social interaction with an American that Maria mentioned where she seems to feel included as an equal familiar rather than a silenced other.

Patricia's one American friendship seemed like it may have blossomed and then faded during the course of the study, not because of any lack of affinity but because of strains on time; this relationship, which I wrote into her case study, was less about mutual understanding and more about a vehicle for social interaction, a pervading need in Patricia's narrative. These social pair-groups service as micro-COPs that provide a source of information about modes of interaction in the United States, as well as a means of acquiring informal examples of English

(something Jawad mentioned several times as something he lacks and desperately wants for his own professional goals). They also provide a sense of belonging to and affiliation with their new host culture, an important and often under-prioritized aspect of many immigrants' transitions to their new countries.

The ease and comfort of interacting within international social groups was also a pervasive theme from the interviews. Those in the English class expressed how much their social encounters there contributed to their well-being and sense of belonging, and the Afghan participants relied on their Afghan community for a sense of connectedness to their home culture and to each other. Patricia and Ohahni, who are both relatively isolated from larger home culture groups, expressed at several points their comfort with and sometimes preference for the company of other internationals. Ohahni, who works at an Amazon distribution center, says she only sits with Asian women at her lunch. She says she is fascinated by their cultures and wants to learn about where they are from with a hope of traveling there someday.

On meeting an Italian woman whose husband worked with her spouse, Patricia shared that she, for the first time in a long while, felt that she had a lot in common with another person: “and I remember when I sat down to talk to her, we had so much in common, even though she's from Italy and I'm from Brazil... And we were sharing stories about our lives. It's so funny we had in common like talking about because we came from another place, and you know, it's hard to make friends and this and that...”

The ability to talk with another person about common experiences was something that was of vital importance to most of the participants, and those whose languages are not represented by larger groups here had fewer opportunities to talk about the challenges and the sensations of relocating to another culture with another language. I felt a stronger sense of isolation with Maria

from Russia and Patricia from Brazil than with the others, and I feel that part of that may be a lack of local community where they can speak fluently and express themselves easily with others who understand both their home cultures and understand the experience of living in America as an immigrant.

The Afghan refugees, on the other hand, were connected to a large COP of other Afghans who had similar experiences and similar trajectories as immigrants here. Jawad talked about how strong the Afghan community is here, but also about how insulated it is. He also expressed its importance for Afghan women, many of whom are encountering arguably higher levels of cultural and social alienation than their husbands:

I can say there is a strong community of Afghans. In terms of helping each other, we are not ... a strong community in terms of interacting with Americans and other communities, like other communities are a bridge between two or three nations - we are not like this, I see, but Afghan communities are helping each other, individuals, just reaching out - they are friends, and they are helping each other.... I found some of them very helpful in terms of finding a job, finding solutions and routes in life, and emotionally they are supportive sometimes because they are telling stories and you can find you are experiencing the same story, experiencing the same situation...

Jawad describes a true COP of individuals supporting each other in similar situations, sharing knowledge gained from the experiences of those who have been here some time and lifting up those who are newly arrived. The support for women, Jawad, says, is important, too, to make them feel less apart from their home country: "Yes, and they feel they are not outside their country because all people around them is the same country, talking the same language, and having the same problems, probably."

Desired COPs

The COPs discussed above are all communities to which, in some form or another, the participants currently belong. Norton (2001) focuses on the importance of what she terms “imagined communities,” spaces to which ELLs desire to gain membership or spaces to which they feel they belong but to which they do not yet have access. For the three Afghan men who participated, their professional identities in their home countries molded their desired communities in the United States and motivated them to learn English for professional purposes while, at the same time, actively retaining their home-culture identities. For the others, the desired communities ranged from professional to educational to social, and English was perceived as the most essential prerequisite for membership to any of them.

Maria, in particular, aspired to belong to an artists’ community; painting was a hobby she practiced back at home and one that gave her a sense of accomplishment and continued to serve as a connection to her past identity as an artist. However, her anxiety about interacting with Americans in English tended to override her motivation to try to find a community. In our first interview, she said, “First the thing I want to do is to find some artists’ community, which I already found... I've found, but I have to just start. You know it's hard, because they are all Americans. And this is a fear for me. And I have to overcome.”

The anxiety she expresses here in interacting with Americans was common to all but one of the participants (Trevor), and this anxiety weighed heavily on the narratives they shared at the interviews and especially in the self-recordings. It seemed an omnipresent weight that made interactions difficult and stressful, even when they felt the interactions went well. Patricia often talked about wanting to talk to others but finding it difficult. Her desired communities pivoted around her desire for a social network. She talked about expecting to find a job here and being

able to meet people through work and how difficult that has turned out to be in reality. Her current job is as a nanny, and her adult interactions are generally limited to discussions about the kids. She commented, “one of the points when I was looking for a job, because I wanted to interact with people and I wanted to be able to talk, because with kids it's hard.” This was the prevailing theme in Patricia’s narratives: her seeming inability to fit in, to find common ground with others. She spoke often about her friend group in Brazil and her desire to find something like that here again:

And this is what I'm upset about, not having friends here. Because when I get a job here, I'm going to have friends and I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that, and my husband he just looks at me, and he's like okay. You know, I miss that a lot, because in my country I was used to having my own friends and all the time we would do different stuff...I miss that here, I miss that a lot. But that's okay, I understand that it's different. Sometimes I think I could go back in time, I would tell myself, you are going to America, but don't think it's going to be exactly the same, your life is going to be really different, and you need to be prepared and get used to that. But if I had this way of thinking I would not be upset and sad.

Patricia and Ohahni both expressed a realization that they believe it is impossible to expect others here in America to speak and interact with them like their peers did back in their home countries. Patricia went further and, in addition to not expecting the same types of relationships, she decided that Americans in general were uninterested in learning about her life (and other immigrants’ lives) in their home countries, and she began to adapt her expectations and her behaviors in her social interactions, limiting the topics of conversations she would initiate, in order to form social relationships with Americans. In her case, the desire to be a

member of a social COP necessitated a dramatic identity negotiation, wherein she decided that she would learn more about what Americans liked to talk about and make that the focus of her social interactions.

In all of the narratives about belonging to COPs, language was the predominant factor that was perceived to either grant or deny legitimate access. All of these adults had studied English in their home countries and had considered themselves strong English speakers, and they had all tested into English-language programs at high intermediate or advanced levels, signaling that they had a strong command of the language. However, many complained that the speed of speech, the varieties of dialects and slang, and the use of informal types of language hindered their understanding of spoken language and also their ability to engage in spoken language.

They also noted that because of their lack of ability to converse informally, they felt “strange” or “foreign” and unable to establish relationships with other Americans where they felt they were on equal footing. All of them shared their preference for social interactions with other foreign-born peers, people who, even though they could generally communicate only through English, seemed to understand each other’s complicated situations as immigrants and, seemingly just as importantly, spoke a form of English that was more accessible to them. Jawad talked about how easily he was able to converse with his American- and Australian-born work colleagues in Afghanistan and then how difficult it was to communicate with almost anyone when he arrived here, and Maria mentioned how much easier it was to speak English with her classmates who studied English as an academic subject back in their home countries. So, for these adults, it seems that the kind of English used, rather than the language itself, was a gatekeeper for legitimate participation in COPs.

Learners' Perceptions of their Identities as English Learners and Speakers

The next two sub-questions focus on learners' perceptions of themselves as English users, how those perceptions change in different COPs and how their patterns of participation fluctuate with and between their COPs. The data that support these two sub-questions inform each other to such an extent that it makes more sense to present them as a unified set of queries rather than as separate topics. Learners in the study expressed a general lack of confidence in their English-language skills, despite having advanced placements in English-language programs. This lack of confidence, and the way they perceived others' biases against their non-native English, made them feel that Americans assumed that, in addition to having a perceived deficit in language, they were also less capable of handling other professional, educational, or quotidian tasks. John expressed this general idea, echoing the other participants' feelings of stupidity when faced with native English speakers. He said, "I don't know sometimes I feel that American people they think that other people who are coming to America, they don't understand anything."

They all expressed frustration with the lack of recognition they had for their past lives: their educations, jobs, and life experiences. They also talked about how difficult it was to advocate for themselves in situations where they perceived this kind of bias. For example, John, Jawad, and Patricia discussed how intimidating over-the-phone interviews were and felt that they immediately cut them out of the running for jobs. Patricia summarizes all of these feelings, concluding that only when they improve their English to a certain undetermined level would they be able to access professional opportunities:

But it's just like I feel sometimes they don't even give us the opportunity to have a nice job just because of the English. I kind of understand, but also it's upsetting how most of us, we studied a lot in our countries, we went to the university, we took a lot of classes,

and we are capable to do a lot of stuff. Just because of the English, they don't - it's really hard to find...especially because the first interview is usually by phone. It's even harder to understand. I know that, so...so what do we do? We just try to improve our English as much as we can...so this is how I feel most of the time, and I think it's more about work, the jobs.

Here Patricia recognizes, using the “us” instead of the more personal “I”, that she and others in her situation as an ELL searching for work, come up against biases and perceptions of deficiency that go beyond language skills; however, in this statement she does not rest on the assumption of stupidity or deficits, she argues that she and others like her have a lot to offer – if only others would listen long enough to learn about them. This was a common theme among several of the participants, both in professional and social spheres. Their identities as ELLs were usually in tension with their identities as professionals and as human beings with something to offer, and they felt that better English was the key to ending the marginalizing practices – like over-the-phone interviews - that hindered further access to jobs they felt well qualified to handle.

Another common thread throughout all of the narratives was patience and how that impacted most of their interactions with native English speakers. Maria described a common scenario among the group and how the interaction left her feeling as though others considered her incompetent or slow-minded:

I noticed that some people when they ask me a question, they don't wait until I will answer. And they stop me in the middle of my answer and start to answer instead of me. Oh, I think you meant something. Yes, I meant that, but why are you not allowing me to answer by myself? Of course, I talk maybe slow, because I have to think in my head. I

have to translate. To find the word in my head in English, but why you stop me in the middle of my answer and continue instead of me? I don't like that.

Maria was the first participant to bring up the issue of patience in spoken communication, and when I asked the other study members about this, they agreed emphatically that this was a huge issue for them on a regular basis. An extreme example was when John asked an English speaker over the phone to speak more slowly, and the person simply responded, “no.” The patterns of being cut off and silenced by English speakers who are unwilling to adapt their speech to make communication more accessible are factors that seem to limit ELLs’ capacity to learn more about language interaction and hinders their confidence in initiating interactions that could otherwise help them access opportunities for integration into desired COPs, whether professional or social.

On our third interview, Patricia had decided to return to school to become a dental assistant. Despite the fact that she already had a university degree from Brazil, she feared that she would not be able to keep up with the English-speaking students. She went back and forth between excitement about the opportunity and fear that she may not be able to keep up:

...probably starting classes, taking classes to be a dental assistant in August, too. End of August it's going to start. I'm so nervous, I'm afraid. I don't know, I'm afraid to get there and to not understand anything, and be scared and be shy, I don't know. It's going to be like, besides the English classes, because everybody is from other countries and we are there for the same purpose, it's going to be my first experience really studying and being around other American people, but I'm afraid because we always have this feeling that they will understand and they will get everything easier than I would because my English and you know, I don't know, I'm just...I'm excited.

Before this decision, Patricia had applied for a number of jobs and had not been invited to a single interview, and her work-related interactions were limited to the children she nannied and their parents. She had not had access to professional and educational situations in the United States that could make her feel more at ease about her potential in this new environment. This kind of isolation was prevalent among all of the study participants, and social isolation also contributed to feelings of otherness among the group. Jawad compared how he perceived his social situation here in the United States to what was familiar to him in Afghanistan, noting how difficult it seemed to be to engage in informal interactions with other Americans and how he felt that he was perceived as a stranger of whom Americans may be fearful. He often described his home life in Afghanistan – and his life among his Afghan community here – as being full of friends and social calls; here he feels like a foreigner who makes other people nervous:

This is a very critical point that I find in America. For example, in the very beginning, when I was here and get out of my home and saw the neighbors coming or going from work, they see me, and they say “hi” but not usually interact with me, like “Oh, how are you? Where are you from?” ...And if you want to get close to a stranger or neighbor to start a chat, they might fear you as a stranger. That's why we find that the culture here, I don't say it's bad or good, but this is culture, and that's the point that we cannot easily access the people - reach the people to start chatting to start friendship to say hello or hi or something to be in touch or interact with the people.

What these examples demonstrate is that the adults in the study perceive themselves to be deficient in English that is good enough to communicate informally with native speakers, obtain a good job, or do well in an educational setting. In their English classes, they are considered advanced and can communicate easily with each other; outside of that group, they find that their

English is met with impatience and sometimes even complete dismissal. As a result of their experiences with language, they express feeling shy or stupid in situations where, in their home countries or with other non-native English speakers, they would probably feel comfortable.

Alignments between Patterns of Participation and Perceptions of Identities

The relationship between participation patterns and the participants' perceptions of themselves as ELLs seems to be cyclical in nature, with their lack of participation in COPs informing how they feel about themselves as outsider ELLs, and their perceptions of themselves as outsiders impacting their identities as English speakers and learners. Maria and Patricia, in particular, had more opportunities to engage in social interactions with English speakers than the other participants, principally because of the primarily American neighborhoods in which they lived and the nature of how their families related to other parts of American systems. Maria's children pushed her into social interactions with other mothers at the bus stop, at school, or at parks, and her husband works as an engineer at a company with other English speakers; Patricia's husband is an American who introduces her into social groups, including his family, with which he is already familiar. Despite the repeated opportunities for engagement, similar patterns of exclusive behavior persist that seem to directly impact their perceptions of themselves as ELLs and as people who have something to contribute.

Maria responded to a prompt I had given her in an audio-recorded self-report about how her reality here differed from her expectations before she arrived. She responded that she felt it all revolves around language, and she assumed the blame for not having engaged conversations with English speakers; she put the burden of communication entirely on herself in this statement:

How is life here different than you imagined? What would make life here better? - I don't know. It's all around language. I would feel myself more comfortable if of course I would

know English well. Sometimes I don't understand people - what they're saying me. That makes me feel so stupid that I don't understand them - very uncomfortable. You know, I'm mad at myself, because I know that I'm not, but I hate when people - I think if she thinks about me in that way, I feel so sad about myself. And I think, why?

The sadness Maria experienced and the fear of coming off as stupid were feelings echoed by most of the group, and many said that they never felt like this in their home countries, that they felt like they were different people here when they attempted to communicate informally with Americans. Patricia remarked in an interview,

I don't know, and this is in my head, it made me feel really bad, and that would make me feel really shy to talk to people...I didn't want to talk...I feel myself very shy, and that I don't talk much when I'm around everybody, but when I'm at home in Brazil with my family and friends, it's everything light and I can talk and say and express myself. I don't know why though. I think that's how it is because everything is different here...And here I just, I think my brain doesn't work as easily, I don't know what to say, I'm shy.

Ohahni, on the other hand, reacted quite differently when she perceived any kind of bias or exclusion on account of either her accented English or her race. She described herself a constant vocal self-advocate and prided herself on talking to store managers, work supervisors, and even local law enforcement when she felt like she was being unfairly judged. In addition to deflecting the perceived insult away from herself, she always considered Americans who showed prejudice against her as unintelligent and unworldly. Here Ohahni describes how she reacts when people at her work – an Amazon distribution center – make assumptions about where she is from:

The first thing that comes up every time they say they think you're Mexican...They make me upset and mad and explain them, I even give them a little history lesson. I get mad, you can't call every Spanish speaker a Mexican because that's now how it is. I'm like, you guys are stupid.

She shared that since the election of the current U.S. president, incidents of open racism toward her have increased at work and in the stores she frequents, and she says she responds this way every time. Over the course of the three interviews, Ohahni's narrative reflected a constant tendency to advocate for herself in this way. Her participation in most interactions with English speakers seems to involve some level of push-back.

She is an active participant in social interactions; however, the types of interactions she engages in do little to support her legitimacy as a member of any COP and reifies, to an extent, an identity based on otherness. This does not necessarily mean that Ohahni cannot achieve legitimacy in a COP; however, the groups to which she currently belongs (i.e., her work environment and her social sphere) do not support a trajectory of increased participation.

One realm where her identity as an ELL and her patterns of participation do seem to build on each other toward greater participation and enhanced legitimacy as an ELL is her volunteerism. She is an active volunteer at a local court where she helps translate between Spanish and English and also at a local clinic for low-income individuals where she helps the nurses and doctors prepare patients for their visits. Here she encounters people who are appreciative of her contributions, ask her about where she is from, and support her in her goals to continue her education in the medical field. She mentioned in one interview that she occasionally would encounter a clinic patient who demonstrated bias against her, and she would react similarly to how she engages in her work and social environments.

Ohahni's patterns of participation and her identity as an ELL vary widely depending on her environment. Her role in each space (i.e., a co-worker, a consumer, and a volunteer) seems to be less of a determiner in cyclically shaping both her identity and her patterns of participation in the respective environments than her co-participants. Out of the eight participants in the study, she and Amy (the older Colombian woman who volunteered with her church) were the only two who had found spaces (their volunteer experiences) that included native English speakers where they experienced a consistent level of legitimate participation. Several of the others mentioned volunteering as something they had wanted to do or had begun to do in their efforts to locate COPs to interact socially in English; however, due to time constraints or to initial negative experiences, none of the others persisted. The need for a safe space where ELLs could feel supported came out as a prerequisite for taking risks and joining spaces that were primarily populated by Americans.

How do adult ELLs negotiate identities within and between their COPs?

Two major themes emerged in the narratives that point to how ELLs negotiate their identities within and between COPs. They all in some way expressed the need for a safe space to speak that could serve as a foundation for confidence and mutual support; they also all drew upon their past identities as a source of strength that helped them make sense of their often tenuous interactions with Americans. A safe space was something that the participants in the study defined as a source of connectedness and strength, a place where they were a true member of a group rather than an outsider with experiences and language patterns that were alien to the other members. For the participants who attended the adult English class, they found a COP where they could learn from each other about how to persevere and could express themselves openly without a fear of judgement. Maria spoke about what the class meant to her: "you feel

that you are not alone in this situation, and when we are together, people with different stories, you know, it makes you stronger, much, much stronger.”

In the COP of the English-language classroom, the ELLs in the study were more able to participate and self-identify in ways that were empowering to them; they could share details about their pasts, express their frustrations with their transitions here, and talk about what they wanted to do with their lives in an environment that was supportive, open to hearing them, and where their unique struggles seemed to be a part of a common story. Several of the participants commented on how important it was for them to have support from each other, and many expressed the social interactions, rather than the English acquisition, as their primary reason for attending the class.

Jawad, John, and Trevor all spoke about how their local Afghan community served as an important safe space for them, a place where they could easily reconnect with their past identities and patterns of participation in Afghanistan and where they could help each other navigate their ways through their new culture and new ways of being in interaction with Americans. Jawad, in particular, shared that many of his conversations with his Afghan friends center on the challenge of finding suitable work and that they all experienced similar levels of isolation in their work environments, seemingly unable to break through to communicate their expertise to those who could be able to help them.

Additionally, the three Afghan men had an SIV refugee status, which means they came to the United States with a stronger network of support systems built into their transition here than do other types of immigrants. They are immediately connected to local IRC offices, social service case workers, and volunteer organizations that focus on supporting the transitions of refugees. All of them had relationships with people from these agencies and with English-

speaking volunteers who would come to tutor or mentor them on a regular basis. Their refugee status came with a network of people who were openly welcoming and supportive, something the others did not experience.

The second major theme that emerged was the connection with and the reliance on past identities as a way to reconcile their current situations with their goals and expectations for their lives here. All but one of the participants found jobs positions for which – language aside – they were highly overqualified, and all were frustrated by the lack of recognition they received for the lives they had led up until their relocation here. (I did not include Maria in this group, as she is staying home with her children until they are in school; she then plans to find employment, hopefully as an art instructor.) The lack of professional recognition seemed to impact other aspects of personal identification, leaving the participants to feel like they are entirely different people here than they were at home. When asked if he felt different here, Jawad responded very openly that he did in many ways:

Well, no, I really, because you know, I have different feeling because I know, I accepted my situation that I am in a different country with different people. What do you expect? I don't expect this to be the same. This is stupid to expect this. No, in Afghanistan, I was a different person, and here I see a totally different person. Yeah, in Afghanistan I was known by a lot of people, I had a lot of relations. The people knew me, they respected me, okay. My position was good. I managed a team of ten to fifteen people. I was in the board of company - board of organizations. I've been a senior manager, a strong part of an organization. I am doing – really, what am I doing here? So, sometimes you have to accept the fact; otherwise, you will not like yourself a lot.

Jawad's narratives often centered around this lack of professional recognition, and he seemed to navigate his identity and participation patterns by leveraging his past experience as a manager and acted as a kind of spokesman for his immigrant group, often employing the "we" to discuss issues in his community and using the self-reflection portion of the study to incorporate the ideas and stories of others in his group. The impacts of his current work situation are magnified by his immediate need to support his family and by his desire to reject the idea - that some people in his home-culture group have begun to consider - that returning home is a viable option. By the third interview, after a month of job-searching, he was exhausted and began to speak about the option of returning home, but he reiterated in the interview that he knew it would be hard and that he needed to give himself more time to find a good life here.

In a very different way, Patricia, who does not have a strong home-culture group from whom she could find support, discussed how her expectations of life here in America contrast with her current reality, as well as with her life in Brazil before she moved. She focused more on her current situation of isolation and less on how she perceived herself as a person here and at home; her focus of navigation was more social than professional. She was younger - twenty-eight at the time of the study - and still, even though she had experienced some early level of success in Brazil, considered her professional life as something that was ahead of her and not a determiner of who she used to be in Brazil. Throughout the study, she navigated between her past social and professional selves and her current situation as someone who was experiencing difficulties meeting friends and finding it impossible to get what she considered was a good job. She talked about the transition and described her current situation as something less than what she had at home and less than what she expected when she came here. In this quote she is working to accept that disparity:

Because sometimes in our countries we have like, everything's already set, you have a good job, you live in a place, you have your place, and you have - you can pay your bills and everything, it's okay, but that was my life. And then I moved down here, and I was like, well, things are not going to be as easy as I thought. ... Sometimes this is discouraging but I think it's okay. Life is not easy anyway. And now I need to think about getting another diploma and going back to school to study. That's okay. It's fine.

Maria talked about trying to co-exist as a participant in her home-country life and as a participant in her new American life. She talks about openly navigating between two versions of herself, even playing a role for her parents when she visits home. In the third interview, she talked about being a first-generation immigrant and existing in two worlds:

The parents still have one leg in their country and another in this country. So, he should be standing on both legs to survive here...And, also it's not like one leg in one country even - it's like identity also, for example, my parents know me Maria from one side, but they don't know me like a person here. I'm completely different...If, for example, my parents would be here - that's not our daughter. But I changed. This country changed me. And I see that my kids are different from kids in my country, and I like it. Yes, I like it. Yes, because this freedom, and you can express what you think...Yes, you know, maybe I play a role for my family because - but how I think about my mind it's different.

While no two narratives in the study followed the same trajectories of participation and self-identification, they all featured sharp and often extreme instances of separation from supportive communities, legitimate participation in a COP, and opportunities for the participants to feel like they were themselves. Most seemed to be existing in an in-between-ness that was neither home nor here, and the temporal nature of the extent of the in-between-ness meant that

they shifted often and, at times, suddenly between identities. At one moment one felt empowered and encouraged by the offer of a new job, and almost immediately afterward he felt like a “stranger” in an environment in which he decided he could not survive. Another felt like a respected member of a church community until a dismissive comment relegated her to an identity of “other” and extinguished her desire to continue volunteering or to study English. Their senses of self as valuable members of communities and their investments in those communities were both bolstered and hampered by the interactions they had with English speakers.

They all expressed a desire to advocate for themselves – to explain to others who they were, what they were capable of doing, and how they had lived before they came here – and to advocate for others who might be experiencing the same struggles. Motivation to learn enough English to self-advocate and participate meaningfully in their communities was strong among the participants, but the motivation was difficult to maintain when their efforts to communicate with English speakers – something that required a lot of confidence and resilience – were so often met with impatience, dismissal, and outright rejection. The narratives suggest that in order to gain legitimacy in any COP, what an ELL must first do is learn how to advocate for the right and the time to be heard.

Chapter 6 Discussion and Implications

To more adequately discuss the continuously variable experiences of inclusion and identity within this group of adult immigrants, a more nuanced version of the theoretical framework upon which this study was built will help illuminate some of the forces at play in the concepts of identity negotiation (Norton, 1995, 2001, 2013) and legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) within the language learning context. To present a more nuanced interpretation of the notion of identity negotiation, this analysis will overlay tensions between identities and fluctuating subjectivities, which I defined in more detail early in Chapter 5, to better capture the temporal and multiple nature of “identity.” Then to critically examine the processes of LPP, I questioned how unique instances of access to LPP determine which identities, patterns of participation, and COPs are available to ELLs in their many communities. In other words, how is access to LPP limited for ELLs, and how does that impact the identity negotiation processes they experience? For adult ELLs, the relationship between membership and access to LPP is dynamic and complicated (Warriner, 2009). This chapter will discuss tensions between ELL identities and subjectivities, the use of the larger collective “we,” issues of access to legitimacy, the burden of communication, and conclude with implications for SLA research and for EL instruction and programming, incorporating suggestions from the participants themselves.

Before I continue with the discussion, I want to emphasize that, from my perception, all of the participants in the study spoke clear and comprehensible English. Additionally, they had all tested into advanced-level English-language classes in the United States. However, all of them repeatedly expressed feeling self-conscious about their English skills, and all of them related repeated stories of failed communication attempts with native speakers, attempts that left them frustrated and, at times, prohibited them from further pursuing professional or social

opportunities. For this group, the burden of “native-like” communication appears to have fallen completely on them, often with little to no effort on the host community’s part to make the conversations work.

Identity Negotiation: Subjectivities and Identities in Tension

The adults in this study held closely to them the tacit knowledge of their identities in their past lives as professionals, speakers of other languages, parents, students, friends, active community members, and citizens of their home countries. Their past identities were often in conflict with the variable and unstable identities available to them in the United States. However temporarily, they found themselves living as drivers, nannies, warehouse workers, house cleaners, and construction workers when in their home countries they were engineers, office managers, business owners, and data specialists. Back at home they were connected to their families and their communities through personal relationships and common activities. In this country they were often silent, isolated from mainstream communities, and working in jobs that were foreign to them and placed them in roles that they felt were less valued. They were also often silenced through direct instruction, as happened in Jawad’s workplace where his supervisor asked him and his Afghan friends not to talk to each other on the job, and they were also routinely silenced through lack of interaction. Their current identities as immigrants remained in constant tension with their past identities as professionals and as members of families and communities.

In my second interview with John, he repeatedly expressed the feeling that he felt out of control of his situation, that there was too much information to take in and too much urgency in the present moment for him to do anything but survive. As a father of five with a wife who was suffering what he described as stress-induced illnesses, he felt intense pressure to work long

hours to take care of his family, but, despite his repeated efforts to find better paying employment, he could not see his way out of their current financially dire situation. As a refugee who was forced to leave his home country, he was also forced to shed his former status as a successful businessman and adopt whatever role he could to survive here. John, like the other participants in the study, felt that if only he could master English, he could regain control of his life. He summarized his situation by explaining, “We cannot find ourselves in this situation.”

Folke (2016) describes migration as a “continual process of disorientation and reorientation” (p. 825). It is a process of shedding and adopting new layers of the self that may be in direct conflict with each other. To better explore how ELLs’ migration processes influence their trajectories toward language acquisition, this analysis will focus on ELLs’ subjectivities, something Vitanova (2005) defines as continuously fluctuating identities that are “constituted through different discourses in which the person is positioned at different times” (p. 140). Identities through this lens are not static or even situational, but rather shift continuously, even within utterances, and depend on a limitless number of factors, especially how one is understood within an interaction, how one is perceived as valuable or equal, and to what extent one is able to express his or her reactions and perceptions to a receptive audience. This focus on the subjective and temporal nature of identity runs in contrast to much of the traditional research on language acquisition which presupposes that a person has an essential core that is either motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, and that these characteristics are primarily what determine a learner’s success in learning language (Norton, 1995, p. 15).

When ELLs are assigned a label, like “immigrant”, “refugee”, “English learner”, “Mexican” (in Ohahni’s example) etc., they are positioned as identities in relation to other identities, such as native-born Americans and native English speakers, and these relationships are

imbued with power differentials that complicate the trajectories toward achieving LPP, especially within multilingual groups. The study narratives included statements about how “stupid” the participants felt in contrast to their American peers and colleagues, and how reticent they were to initiate contact with English speakers. The perceived label-driven differences in their interactions became “associated with feelings of inferiority (‘maybe they think I’m stupid’) and fear” (Folke, 2016, p. 832) that stymied their capacities to participate fully in their communities. These perceived differences also limited their opportunities to acquire the social norms and situational language that would help them gain access to the types of interactions in which they were attempting to engage. In the identity-laden nature of social exchanges, their non-native-ness made them “others” who seemed to have little capacity to contribute to their interactions within multilingual COPs.

In addition to the linguistic issues of interactions with English speakers, five of the participants also experienced a significant change in their social class that impacted how they perceived themselves in interaction with others. Patricia, for example, who worked as a professional in hospitality in Rio de Janeiro, repeatedly expressed that she felt she was being judged because of her current position as a nanny. She remarked, “not that I’m ashamed to be a babysitter, but I think here is so much, like, what do you do?...Where do you live? It’s so much about that. It’s like, oh, I’m a nanny. They’re looking at me, like, oh, nice.” She felt she was looked down on and ignored in social settings because of her job. Jawad also commented often about how he and his fellow Afghan refugees were overlooked in their job searches because of their non-native English. He stated that

“the majority of newcomers in SIV, I can say are highly qualified for better jobs, but these are the jobs here - the very basic jobs, like physical jobs, and it’s especially long

hours, like ten to twelve hours, and problematic for them. And you're feeling upset for some time to find a better job...some of them are stuck in the basic [entry-level jobs], and that's why they are getting frustrated.”

Their drastic change in socioeconomic class not only produced financial but also identity-laden stresses that often resulted in discussions about returning home to a dangerous situation where at least they could recognize themselves as the successful professionals they were at home. They felt marginalized from the social class to which they had belonged at home, adding yet another layer of otherness to their lives in the United States.

Folke (2016) and Ahmed (2006) discuss how our performances in relation to other people signal our levels of legitimacy and inclusion. Folke writes about “embodied experiences of inclusion” that are “structured along performative lines...what it means to be included becomes an intersubjective experience with embodied dimensions – the feeling of ‘being in line’ with other bodies” (p. 824). This idea of “being in line” is critical to the understanding of how ELLs interact in informal social situations where the rules of communication are formed by those who participate. Ahmed also writes about being “in line” and how that empowers us to be and act in ways that we desire. She writes, “we are ‘in line’ when we face the direction that is already faced by others, which makes us feel at ease and at home. Being ‘in line’ allows bodies to extend into space that, as it were, have already taken shape” (p. 15). Here she argues that if we are and act “in line” or, in other words, act along the same behavioral expectations as our fellow actors, then we are able to express ourselves and grow into ourselves.

When ELLs are perceived to be “in line” with others, much like the participants expressed feeling in their English class, they can participate equally with each other and create a COP that supports their development as human beings in interaction with their worlds.

Conversely, when bodies are considered “out of line” they are “positioned as ‘strangers’” ...who could be described as “not really belonging” and thus are stopped from participating equally within a community (Folke, 2016, p. 825). When they are perceived as “out of line” and considered a “stranger”, as Jawad described himself in his job training course, LPP is all but impossible; their roles in COPs are marginalized, and they may withdraw their participation altogether, as Jawad did when he quit his new job.

Vitanova (2005) writes that “learners take up different subject positions in different discourses” (p. 139). The subject positions (subjectivities) they act upon in a given situation are formed in large part by the positions (situational identities) assigned to them by others acting in a COP. The participants in this study uniformly expressed a change from how they knew themselves to be in their home countries to how they felt themselves to be as people here. At home they felt professional, socially connected, and outgoing. Here they expressed feeling “stupid”, undervalued in the workplace, and shy with others.

All were motivated to learn English and were actively pursuing higher levels of English language acquisition, and most expressed a desire to become more integrated into social aspects of American life, but the repeated instances of marginalization in their workplaces and social interactions left many feeling frustrated to the point of self-directed silencing and sometimes outright withdrawal. Amy, after twelve years of living here, studying English, and volunteering with her church, developed a strong resistance to learning or even speaking English after an experience at her church where she felt discarded as a member of her community because of her language skills; Patricia dreaded social situations where she feared she would sit in silence because no one felt they had anything in common with her; and Maria expressed a sense of panic in impromptu social interactions, fearful of not being able to understand others or to express

herself and fearful of appearing “stupid”. All avoided phone conversations with English speakers because of their fear that communication would break down entirely. These examples reveal how tenuous motivation can be and how much it depends on the context of the situation in time.

Pavlenko (2002) writes that “investments are selective and may shift over time” (p. 293).

Repeated instances of silencing and marginalizing reinforce the subjective position of “stranger” who is “out of line” with her community and who is not an equal participant, which often stifles motivation and investment in situated learning. On the other hand, moments of inclusion and equal participation can work to reinforce perceptions of legitimacy and “being in line” with others, serving to motivate investment toward LPP.

The notion that immigrants and refugees are either motivated or unmotivated to learn English is a simplification of an enormously complex process of not only language acquisition, but also cultural acquisition and situational awareness. Norton’s concept of investment helps clarify the idea of motivation in language acquisition by incorporating the sociocultural histories of those involved in any communication, as well as situational factors that may shift the perceptions of legitimacy within an interaction. When an ELL is repeatedly considered to be a “stranger” and does not have opportunities to re-define herself within a COP, then the COP reifies her identity as silent and illegitimate. How well a language learner perceives she is “in line” with the others in an interaction plays a large role in how much she is able to contribute to the communication. Patterns of participation – whether inclusive or exclusive – tend to reify, further cementing the role that a learner plays and turning that role into an identity that others can assign to the ELL, perpetuating a cyclical process of assigning and acting out assigned identities within a community.

The “We” Subjectivity

An important theme that emerged from the data was an identification with a larger “we” population that was sometimes used to refer to the members of the English class, sometimes to other Afghan refugees in America, and often to the larger group of immigrants in this country, people whom the participants had not met but with whom they felt a connection through the perceived experience of a common struggle. In the process of language acquisition in a new country, the ELLs are transitioning both into and out of a culture. They are becoming a part of a new country where they are often considered “other”, and they are transitioning out of their home country where they now, increasingly with time, may also be considered “other.”

Ahmed (2000) shares an excerpt from a narrative about estrangement from one’s home culture and identity. In the excerpt a woman discusses how comforting she found airports, because in that space, she has a destination and can feel comfortable with the in-between-ness of the airport space. She talked about going home at the end of the work day to her house in London, home to her family in Paris on holidays, and then occasionally to their “real home” in India where they no longer had an actual building they called home. When she transitioned to talking about India, she also transitioned to the usage of “we” instead of “I”. She went on to say that, although it was “home”, she “couldn’t remember anything.” Ahmed writes that “The very failure of memory [of one’s life in a home country] is compensated for by collective memory...in which the subject can allow herself to fit in, by being assigned to a forgotten past (‘Of course we’d had a home once, but when India was divided, it was all lost...’).” Ahmed concludes, “Through the very loss of a past...the ‘we’ comes to be written as home” (p. 77 – 78).

Her conclusion is that immigrant narratives of leaving home produce so many homes and thus no real home. There are too many pasts to which immigrants may attach themselves, but which may also seem distant and to which they may feel untethered. Migrants are often

constructed as strangers in their new host communities; they are also re-constructed as strangers in their homes of origin, an “other” who has left and is perceived as having become a part of something else. The “we” in immigrant narratives becomes a mechanism for inclusion and belonging, a way to attach to a comfortable destination.

Jawad, in particular, often used the “we” as a way of identifying himself as part of a group – a group of Afghan refugees who were struggling to find their places in their new country. Maria, who was less connected to a home-language group here, used the “we” to talk about the general immigrant population in the United States and also to talk about her classmates, perhaps as a means of combating the social isolation she expressed she felt and to establish a connection to others in this country. Amy, Patricia, John, David, and Ohahni also used the “we” to talk about immigrants’ contributions to the country that they felt were overlooked and dismissed; they also used the “we” to discuss what they felt they needed in order to become more included and more “in line” with life here. As a way to cope with a feeling of in-between-ness between a now distant home culture and an unfamiliar host culture, the adoption of the “we” was a powerful mechanism to establish a sense of connectedness in the face of repeated social and professional isolation.

Access, Legitimacy, and the Burden of Communication

Another prevalent theme throughout the narratives was the placement of the burden of communication. Throughout the interviews and audio-recorded self-reflections, a common thread was the lack of patience that native English speakers exhibited during spoken communication. For example, during a phone interview, when John asked if the person speaking could speak a little more slowly, the man simply responded “no” and continued talking at his faster pace. Pavlenko (2002) lists a number of ways that native speakers trigger

miscommunication: speaking too rapidly, producing long and complex sentences, and using slang or local dialects. She describes these as “subtle linguistic gatekeeping strategies” (p. 290) that prohibit ELLs from being able to comprehend or to respond appropriately.

In addition to these gatekeeping strategies, Lippi-Green (1997) identifies another kind of language bias that goes beyond second-language acquisition issues and speaks to the challenges faced by language users in their attempts to access legitimacy within desired COPs. She writes that there is “...a bias toward an abstract, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class” (p. 64). This “idealized, homogenous...language” is termed Standard Language Ideology (SLI) and can work in concert with gatekeeping strategies to relieve native speakers of the pressure of comprehensibility, meaning that, to achieve legitimacy in many COPs, not only must ELLs learn the vocabulary and grammar of English, they must also master a form of spoken language that is perceived as legitimate to the listener. In this view, it is not necessarily the non-nativeness of an ELL’s English that precludes reception, but rather it is the non-legitimate status that is assigned to their English by members of certain COPs. What is considered legitimate depends on the symbolic capital associated with specific types of English as determined by specific groups of people or COPs. If one has a legitimate form of language, then one is a member of a group. And if one is a member of a group, then one gains the right to be heard by others in that group. Following this line of thinking, ELLs have not earned the right to be heard by others in an English-speaking context, and, therefore, the burden falls on them to learn and appropriately apply expected conventions of language in order to be heard.

Bourdieu (1977) wrote explicitly about the power of linguistic capital in determining access to desired social fields and therefore to the kinds of habitus (or learned behaviors) that would signal that one was a member of a specific kind of social field. SLI is an example of a gatekeeping strategy that is particularly difficult for ELLs to penetrate. He wrote that “language is a praxis” (p. 646), something that is learned and enacted through practice and cannot be separated from its function. Language and function are inextricably intertwined, and language is made to be “spoken appropriately” within a given context in time (p. 646). When a listener receives language that is outside of the established norms and expectations of that social field, there is an immediate acknowledgement of otherness. Whether that otherness is invited into a space or is excluded from that space is dependent on myriad factors, including the listener’s familiarity with that brand of “otherness” as well as the “other’s” agency to act within that social sphere, even without the appropriate grammar and usage that signals full membership. Bourdieu writes that “practical competence is learnt in *situations*, in practice” (italics in original) (p. 647), which means that whether learners are given or denied access to spaces in which to learn desired forms of language use determines to a large extent whether they can advance in either situationally appropriate language use or in achieving membership in the COPs to which they desire to belong.

In the field of English-language instruction, the term “compassionate listener” is often used to describe someone who is accustomed to communicating with non-native varieties of English at a range of acquisition levels. In the cases presented here, the acquisition levels were relatively high with all participants exhibiting a strong understanding of English language form and grammar and an advanced knowledge of vocabulary, and in all but one case, their accents did not hinder comprehensibility in the interviews or in their self-reflections. I acknowledge that

I fall under the category of the “compassionate listener” as likely do their English teachers, refugee case workers, and the international friends with whom they socialized. These listeners are more likely accustomed to “other” forms of grammar and language usage and may employ more strategies to increase comprehensibility. However, instances of communication breakdowns that the participants described in their daily interactions with native English speakers were constant, even in simple situations, like ordering a coffee in a cafe or shopping for food in a grocery store. The burden of intelligible communication with native English speakers who were not perhaps “compassionate listeners” fell almost entirely on the shoulders of the ELLs themselves, making it difficult to achieve any level of legitimacy within their multilingual communities.

The burden of communication issue is directly related to questions of access to opportunities to interact in English, to work alongside English speakers, and to integrate into social life with English speakers. Pavlenko (2002) writes that human agency is “shaped by particular sociocultural environments and ...co-constructed with those around the L2 (second language) users; thus, individuals may act upon their wishes only if their present environments allow for such agency” (p. 293). ELLs must be able to speak to others in their COPs if they can begin to achieve some level of agency to direct their trajectories toward more LPP.

Inclusion in many COPs then appears to be predicated on downplaying one’s differences, including one’s native language, and working to adopt the behavioral and linguistic patterns of the desired COP (Folke, 2016). However, few native English speakers seem to be willing ambassadors to support ELLs’ transitions into community membership. Emerson (1997) writes that “where there are few opportunities for others to orient to us, there are no tools for living in that space” (p. 223). The absence of COP mentors for ELLs, along with persistent linguistic

gatekeeping mechanisms, makes the accessibility of important tools, like “compassionate listeners” in desired COPs, out of reach for many ELLs. Without supportive models and consistent access to legitimate practice, the study participants’ inbound trajectories in their desired COPs became daunting, exhausting, and twisting paths.

Foucault (1984) writes, “as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized” (p. 110). The right to discourse is something systematically denied to many ELLs in their desired COPs, even to those with high levels of English language competency. Without consistent access to LPP in COPs, whether they are formal COPs like workplaces and educational spaces or informal COPs like church volunteering or mommy-and-me groups, ELLs’ capacity to engage in discourse with English speakers is limited. And without discourse, the ELLs’ agency as human beings to advocate for themselves and speak to their abilities to contribute to their desired COPs is diminished. Increasing opportunities for meaningful discourse and engaging in ways to self-advocate are two mutually informing ways of participation that these ELLs expressed an urgent desire to pursue in an effort to be more “in line” with both the communities in their new host country and with their experiences of their past selves, selves that seemed to be compartmentalized into an “otherness” that is increasingly distant to them and generally unrecognized by others in their desired COPs.

Implications: Critical Access to Advocacy

An important aspect of English language acquisition that is often overlooked in research and instructional practice is the co-constructed nature of a multilingual interaction. There exist social forces that either advance or stymie access to participation within a communicative act, and an awareness of – and an incorporation of strategies to combat – socially driven barriers to

communication could empower ELLs to interact with enhanced agency in situations where they may otherwise meet with resistance and dismissal. Access to LPP is an inherently critical issue in that if legitimacy is denied because of a perceived deficit based on language performance (i.e., accent, vocabulary usage, or dialect mastery), then there exists a need to examine the social constructs at play that lead to this kind of linguistically-driven marginalization.

Bourdieu (1977) writes about an “authorized language” that sets a standard within a community (or more broadly within a social field), and the structure of a linguistic interaction depends on the “symbolic power relation between the two speakers” (p. 648). With an understanding that the language one uses functions as linguistic evidence of one’s symbolic capital within a social field, competence within a social sphere can then be equated with the “capacity to command a listener” (p. 648). In other words, if one knows how to use the language appropriate for a given specific situation and a given set of listeners, then one can gain access to that sphere and is able to initiate interaction on a level playing field. Bourdieu wrote about the “right to speech” or to the right to have one’s speech be considered as legitimate by listeners; he wrote that “competence implies the power to impose reception” (p. 648) and that without that power (without the linguistic competence needed in that particular situation), one cannot express themselves with the expectation that they will be listened to, and with that lack of reception, one cannot achieve LPP.

A prevalent need expressed in the interviews and self-reflections was the need to advocate and “defend yourself” (Ohahni) against bias, misconceptions about home cultures, politics involving home countries, acts of discrimination, and against interactions resulting in social and professional isolation. Access to discourse in which the participants could act as legitimate co-communicators was something that all of the participants desired. Their agency to

do so was often challenged by co-constructed barriers. For example, Patricia's out-going personality was often overshadowed by her feeling of isolation in social gatherings when others in the group would walk away from conversations with her after she shared that she was from Brazil and was working as a nanny. She then became shy and fearful of initiating conversation, thus reinforcing her role as a silent other. The barrier of a seeming lack of common ground on which to build a social interaction was initiated and re-enacted by the perceptions of otherness that each had of the other. Ohahni, as a less subtle example, shared a number of stories about incidents of open racism against her in her workplace and in commercial establishments wherein she would immediately respond to the other person in self-defense, charging the other with ignorance. While Ohahni assumed the role of self-advocate in the interaction, in the manner she used to do so, she also established a distance between co-communicators that destroyed the perception of legitimacy of either participant. In other words, communication broke down, and neither participant was able to engage in actual discourse with the other. How then does an ELL self-advocate without breaking down communication?

Vitanova (2005) argues that dialogue is a "socially embedded, meaning-making process" (p. 143) and that it is a form of agency where one can answer to others' voices and respond to their value positions. She places agency within the framework of a COP, positing that "...agency is a relationship, mediated between learners and their communities of practice" (p. 140), meaning that agency is created both as an individual and as a co-constructed enterprise. Dialogue in this sense is necessary for agency in that it is through discourse with others that we act out our beliefs and our values, and that we gain legitimacy within communities. In doing so, we become co-participants in a COP by building up the knowledge base through expressions of our own experiences and axiological positions.

Traditional approaches to SLA research and language instruction focus on both cognitive and sociocultural aspects of the language acquisition process; however, awareness of how agency is both enacted and retracted in social discourse is a fundamental element of cultural and language acquisition processes that is missing from mainstream approaches to adult English language instruction. Norton (2000) has interrogated and expanded commonly accepted definitions of communicative competence (a concept of situational language awareness and the application of relevant communication skills) by arguing that competence also includes an “awareness of how to challenge and transform social practices of marginalization” as well as “the ability to claim the right to speak” (p. 25). Competence within linguistic exchanges between two or more speakers necessarily involves the capacity of both participants, not only the ELL, to comprehend and to be comprehensible. Issues of access to the “right to speech” (Bourdieu, 1977) and access to reception are factors that are critical to successful communication in a multilingual context, and they are factors that future SLA researchers and instructional designers must incorporate if they are to account for the complexity of language acquisition within the target-language context.

Limitations of the Study

The complexity of the adult ELL context in the United States necessitates a more expansive examination of language acquisition and access to LPP that incorporates a wider range of voices over a longer timeline. This study focused on ELLs who had already achieved a level of communicative competence that allowed them to participate easily in this study without the aid of an interpreter; the lack of voice from those who are working to learn the mechanics of English language is a deficit of a study that seeks to explore ELLs’ access to COPs where they can achieve legitimacy as both a language speaker and as a member of that community.

A potential limitation of this study was that it was conducted in English, the participants' target language. Having the ability to speak to these topics in their native languages could well have yielded more insights and deeper reflections. The presence of an interpreter may also have compromised the participant-researcher relationship, but, especially in consideration of the nature of this study, providing access to dialogue in native languages would have provided a more equitable platform for them to fully participate in the construction of the research. Kosny, MacEachen, Lifshen, & Smith (2014) found that several factors (i.e., varying styles of interpretation, miscommunications between interpreter and researcher, and breeches of interview protocols) impact data quality when interpreters become part of the research. The participants were selected in part because of their intermediate to advanced levels of spoken English; however, there remains the possibility that they cut short their reflections or withheld comments because they felt they could not express themselves as they wanted to in English.

Methodologically, I feel that I would have collected more meaningful data from more of the participants through the self-reflections if I had provided more in-depth instruction and modeling at the first interview meeting. Many expressed that they felt awkward and unsure of what exactly I wanted them to do between the first and second meetings, and their recordings were much fuller and more revelatory during the second half of the study. Adding an additional meeting to collect more self-reflections and to meaningfully reflect on the research process would also have added valuable insights into how (or if) an opportunity to focus on their trajectories as ELLs and as residents in a new country impacted their interactions and motivations within their communities. Only three of the participants consistently recorded reflections, and those reflections constituted some of the most valuable data of the study; more of this real-time data would be valuable in painting a more complete picture of the ELL experience.

Additionally, aside from myself, the study was completely devoid of the narratives of English speakers in interaction with ELLs, an important limitation that I will expand upon in the next section.

Implications for Future Research

There is a need in the field of SLA research for a heightened focus on the adult ELL context. As our population becomes increasingly linguistically diverse, so does the need to prepare English-learning adults for their COPs with relevant instructional design and access to opportunities for LPP in their desired communities. To do this, SLA research must expand its concepts of communicative competence to incorporate the varied social, educational, and professional contexts that ELLs encounter and include the inevitable power relations that comprise multilingual interactions in these situations. A focus on acts of agency and how ELLs can gain access to LPP in their COPs would provide valuable frameworks for exploring how adult ELLs encounter their worlds and how instruction can empower them to act more fully as members of their communities.

The study members all expressed a desire to learn more English vocabulary and grammar, and they also all expressed an urgent need to stand up for themselves as valued members in their many formal and informal communities. This first desire to learn the structure and mechanics of the English language is one that is amply covered in SLA research; what is largely missing, however, is how this linguistically driven desire varies with ELLs' experiences in relation to the latter need – to defend themselves and achieve some level of LPP in their communities. There is a need in adult ELL contexts to expand the notion of language learning and acquisition to encompass the ability to use language in situations where an ELL's language

use may be restricted. In other words, research needs to question how and through what kinds of circumstances ELLs achieve agency to speak within their COPs.

Incorporating a post-structural approach to language acquisition research would support this to a large extent by acknowledging the fluctuations in language learners' subjectivities within dialogues that are imbued with differential relations of power. Pavlenko (2002) writes that SLA as a field continues to be influenced by the Chomskian view of language as biologically innate rather than a social phenomenon...the bulk of research concentrated on the learner's 'black box' and only peripheral attention was paid to 'external factors', which were seen at best as affecting the type and amount of input that goes into the 'box' (p. 277).

SLA researchers are increasingly attending to "external factors" and have adopted socioeducational and sociopsychological models (Pavlenko, 2002) that attempt to incorporate social and personal characteristics into language learning processes; however, there are several limitations of these approaches that fail to account for the complexity of human interactions and the impacts of situational factors on motivation and agency in speech acts.

Many of these SLA models assume a steady in-bound trajectory toward language mastery, a kind of idealized version of LPP where ELLs learn language from more proficient speakers through continued exposure and practice. Several specific criticisms make these models problematic, particularly for adult ELLs who are often learning English outside of formalized educational institutions. These models generally assume that cultures, motivation, and attitudes toward learning are static and unchanging; they generally ignore issues of power in the relationship between majority and minority groups; and the studies upon which much of the research is built utilize questionnaires as the primary methodology, an approach that may not be

able to account for the unanticipated complexity of an adult's language learning trajectories (Pavlenko, 2002).

Pennycook (1990, 2001) argued for a need to rethink language acquisition within its social, cultural, and political contexts and begin to take into account relations of power while also acknowledging the agency of the subject in its multiple incarnations within different discourses. Norton (1995) initiated a new focus in SLA on identity and investment in both language and cultural acquisition that took into consideration the impacts on the language learning process of differential access to agency within unique contexts.

What I argue for is an expansion of Norton's notion of investment (i.e., a fluid and shifting relationship with target identities and communities that impacts a learner's motivation and capacity to acquire more language) and to incorporate a more post-structural lens in approaches to SLA research. Following Bourdieu's (1991) line of thinking, post-structural theories of SLA view language as symbolic capital and a site for identity construction. They also incorporate Wenger's (1998) view of language acquisition as a form of language socialization and a view of second language users as agents whose multiple identities are dynamic and fluid (Pavlenko, 2000). This kind of approach allows SLA researchers to examine how ELLs' "linguistic, social, cultural...and ethnic identities...are constituted and reconstituted in the process of language learning and use (Pavlenko, 2000, p. 283). This lens reframes language learning in a way that highlights the critical nature of access to not only language but also to identities that empower ELLs to speak.

An additional recommendation for future SLA follows from a critique of the questionnaire-driven methodologies of much research on language acquisition administered to ELLs. Incorporating more narrative approaches into SLA research allows for a wider scope of

experiences and identities to emerge; they may also shed light on how language itself impacts subjectivities and how the telling of one's story can influence the position of the teller. Wortham (2001) writes that

autobiographical narratives might construct or transform the self in part because, in a telling of the story, the narrator adopts a certain interactional position... In other words, autobiographical narratives may give meaning and direction to narrators' lives and place them in characteristic relations with people, not only as narrators represent themselves in characteristic ways but also as they enact characteristic positions while they tell their stories (p. 9).

In addition to utilizing narrative-based approaches to research adult ELLs' language acquisition processes, longitudinal qualitative designs that allow for the development of close relationships between participants and researchers over time would provide opportunities for in-depth explorations of micro and macro influences on trajectories of LPP. During this three-month study, I hesitated to approach sensitive topics like the potential impacts of anti-immigrant rhetoric in the media and current events involving refugee groups and asylum seekers for fear of alienating my participants, or worse, for fear of causing unnecessary distress. A longer study would allow for these kinds of discussions to arise after a solid foundation of trust and comfort had been established between participants and the researcher. The potential impacts of these kinds of messages and events are likely important factors in how ELLs construct agency in their interactions with English speakers and in their decisions to pursue their own goals in their host communities. They are worth pursuing in depth, and longer studies would allow for those explorations.

The final implication for further research stems from the finding in this study that ELLs are generally held responsible for the mutual comprehensibility of an interaction. And with SLA research, the ELLs themselves have borne the brunt of the responsibility for providing information about how learners acquire language in the target culture. As Deaux (2006) writes, “the focus of empirical investigation is rarely on the host community...” (p. 133). Future research needs to incorporate the narratives of the target-language speakers who are in interaction with ELLs and needs to attend to how their motivations and capacities to communicate with ELLs shifts in relation to social, cultural, personal, and situational factors. Only when the stories of both communicators are examined will a fuller picture of language-acquisition-in-interaction emerge.

Implications: Instruction and Program Design for ELLs

The study findings led to several important implications for more effective adult English language (EL) instruction. First, following recommendations to incorporate more awareness of power differentials into SLA research, instruction should focus on how ELLs interact with other English speakers in social, political, and cultural contexts where English is the majority language and prepare learners with tools to self-advocate in dialogue. Secondly, EL programmatic design should allow for opportunities for ELLs to interact and learn in contexts where a perceived English deficiency is not the primary rationale for participation.

Critical ESL pedagogy should challenge the cultural and linguistic dominance of the majority culture and empower ELLs to “unsettle commonsense assumptions, theorize matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic polity” (Giroux, 2011, p. 3). ELLs in particular face a daunting task in challenging the hegemonic status quo. Before they can dismantle it, they must first be able to understand exactly

what the status quo is, which is no easy feat considering it is communicated in a language and through cultural norms and expectations that are foreign to them.

Discussing a model of inclusive pedagogy in the Oyster-Adams Bilingual School in Washington, D.C., Cummins found that “micro-interactions between teachers and students in bilingual schools ‘refuse’ the discourse of subordination that characterizes the wider society and most conventional school contexts” and that most discourse in those schools “reflects an ideological assumption that linguistic and cultural diversity is a resource to be developed by all students, and not a problem that minority students must overcome in order to participate and achieve at school” (p. 239). This particular school requires all students to become bilingual in English and Spanish, shifting the balance of English dominance and changing the way students are socialized into the mainstream. In this model, the English hegemony is questioned, and non-native-English-speaking students are not defined by their language “deficiencies,” but rather, valued as contributors to a culturally and linguistically inclusive environment with assessment measures that reflect their experiences and language assets. This model could be translated into adult ELL contexts through vocational charter schools that provide instruction in both industry-training content and multiple languages, through volunteer organizations that target a multilingual volunteer group, through adult basic education programs that utilize ELLs in foreign-language instruction, or through any space where multilingualism is explicitly valued as an asset.

Language instruction is a tool for language learners to use, but it is only a tool. In order for ELLs to participate fully in their own lives, they must be able to recognize, challenge, and work to reconstruct the oppressive powers that hold them back from reaching their potential as valued members of their new communities. Critical pedagogies can help empower ELLs with

these tools and give them the agency to construct their own futures. Dual-language programs where adult English learners and native English speakers work and learn together could go a long way toward shifting the power dynamics toward the center of multilingual interactions and empowering ELLs to demonstrate the knowledge and experience they are often unable to show in English-dominant contexts.

To conclude, the participants themselves offered suggestions for learning English as adults in the United States. In Jawad's first round of reflections he asked for an informal forum for English-language use, one where ELLs could comfortably converse with Americans:

It is a good idea, besides having an official class, a ground should be provided for those people who are weak in the language to have an interaction or in-person communications ... with the American people...they actually practice language speaking, and they get more confidence when they speak unofficially with the people and very personally with the people. It will ease their learning....I mean to sit and chat with the people and ask a lot of questions. This is really life, and this is actually one of the ways they can learn a lot. They can take the confidence from the conversation, so that would be a good idea if they included this in the education material or curriculum.

Jawad also strongly recommended increased preparation for refugees to help them form realistic expectations of what life would be like here, how they could better prepare themselves to enter the job market, and how different their formal academic language instruction would be from what they would encounter when they arrived in the United States.

Ohahni emphasized the importance of continuing to study English in order to defend oneself. When asked what advice she would give other ELLs, she responded,

Well, keep going to school here...you know, even if you speak, you go to all those people who doesn't accept you, imagine when you don't know English at all. So, I think it's good to keep going to school and get a little more fluent, because at least you can defend yourself, and you don't let people put you down and jump on top of you because they try to humiliate you. You know, if you can defend yourself, you can also do it to them, because I don't let nobody do that to me.

When asked the same question, Patricia responded,

The only thing I could say if I could give advice to people is to try to be open, try not to be shy, talk to people, do your best, and that's it. And talk, don't be shy about your accent or if you don't know a word, or if you're going to say something wrong... And here I think most of us, we're shy, and we don't want to say anything. We speak very low because we are just scared; I don't know why we're scared, but we're just scared. I think we should just let it go and not care much about it.

Both of their responses reflect a tacit acknowledgement of the power relations embedded in language exchanges. They felt a real need to defend themselves against real and perceived discrimination and bias; they also felt fearful of initiating communication, hesitant to engage in what might become an incomprehensible exchange or an outright rejection.

In his second interview, David reflected on his ELL peers' comments that they often felt stupid in interactions with Americans:

I have that perception... But you said they feel that Americans think they're stupid. Yeah, that happens with everybody, I think. That's what we have to be - to be focusing on what we're doing. I always try to do that - I don't focus on the other people, I try to be focused,

I mean, I don't care what they say. I try to do my things, and I try, but some people cannot do that. I think it's a process.

As Wenger (1998) observes, the question of demonstrated and recognized competence is central to discussions of engaged participation and situated learning. When much of an ELL's energy is spent on overcoming feelings of stupidity or otherness, the trajectory toward legitimacy within a community is compromised, and ELLs are not provided opportunities to demonstrate competence linguistically, professionally, or otherwise. In a study of newly arrived immigrant students in Sweden, Folke (2016) argued that "...there needs to be self-awareness about the structures of the receiving school community and an observant approach towards the construction of exclusionary lines within the school" (p. 836). This is an imperative consideration for adult EL programs, which, in the contexts of the participants of this study, are isolated from other English speakers and focus on content that is largely irrelevant to the realities of their social and professional lives. In SLA research, in instructional planning, in workplaces, and in public institutions where ELLs and native English speakers co-constitute situational social structures, native English speakers must learn to be aware of the boundaries they present to ELLs.

The men and women in this study demonstrated a strong commitment to learning English and improving their lives here, but, as John commented in an interview, "we cannot find ourselves in this situation." As members of a community, they should not have to. Much like newcomers in any COP need access to legitimate participation, ELLs require opportunities for legitimate interaction in order to acquire the situationally appropriate linguistic and cultural tools that will enable them to access social fields and ways of being that are in line with their past experiences of themselves and are also in line with the goals they carry with them for their

futures in their new countries. Newcomers in any COP need old-timers to act as mentors to pass down the skills, knowledge, and expectations that are embedded in the culture of any community. But, perhaps in this increasingly linguistically diverse world, the labels of “newcomer” and “old-timer” become less meaningful. ELLs have much to teach, and old-timers could greatly benefit from assuming more of a newcomer role to learn what they can from newcomers to this country. This kind of realignment of roles would empower both ELLs and native speakers with the capacity for meaningful discourse and would strengthen any COP to which ELLs were granted opportunities for legitimate participation.

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Appendix A

Initial Contact Email to Instructors and Agency Representatives

Dear _____,

I'm writing this to follow up on a conversation we had recently about a study I am conducting as part of a doctoral degree, and I'd like to provide a little more information with this email and then follow up with a phone call, additional email, or a face to face meeting, whichever works best for you.

First, the focus of the study: The research I am conducting will focus on how adult English learners navigate their identity positions in their various communities, including their English classes and work spaces. I am interested in their perceptions about their communities, how they self-identify in them, what kinds of participation characterizes their experiences in them, and particularly how their identity and participation in one community may impact their identity and participation in another.

Data collection methods: The data will come primarily from interviews and self-reports from the adult ELLs. The research design is an emergent design, meaning that as new data emerges, additional sources may be identified, like relevant documents or English-speaking friends and colleagues. The initial plan for data collection calls for three semi-structured interviews with each participant as well as weekly self-reports that they will either audio-record or write in a journal. All of the information will remain confidential and safely stored. All participants will have at least two opportunities to provide feedback on the findings during the study.

I am looking to recruit 6 to 8 learners, and I am offering a \$50 compensation in the form of a Visa gift card in appreciation for their participation.

I would love to either talk with you over the phone or I am happy to meet in person to discuss the project and address any questions or concerns. Let me know when may be convenient some dates and times over the next few weeks.

Thank you for your help with this project, and I look forward to talking with you soon!

Kate

Appendix B

Script for Student Recruitment

Introduction: Hello! My name is Kate Rolander. I am a doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University, and I am studying how adult English learners communicate with native English speakers in their communities, like work places and English classes.

Description of the study: There is not very much information available about adult English learners actually learn English, so looking at information about how adults who are learning English live their everyday lives may help teachers and leaders plan programs and classes that help English learners in more parts of their personal, educational, and work lives.

Expectations for participation: In the study, we will have three one-on-one interviews that will be six weeks apart – which equals a total of three months. In between those interviews, I will give you either an audio-recorder (show one of the audio recorders) or a journal (show one of the journals) to either speak or write weekly reflections – like a diary – about what we discussed in the interviews, and any other important thoughts you want to share.

Benefits of the study: If you decide to participate in the study, you will receive a small gift card at each of the three interviews: \$10 for the first one, \$20 for the second, and \$20 at the third interview. You will also be able to keep the audio recorder or journal after the study. Also, many

people find it helpful to talk about their experiences, and what we learn as part of this study could help make programs and classes better for other English learners. Another potential benefit is that these conversations may be good practice for English conversation.

Follow-up for more information: For more information on the study and on how to contact me, please keep this flyer. If you know anyone else who might be interested in participating, please feel free to pass it on to them. Thank you!

Appendix C

Student Recruitment Flyer

Adult English-language Learners

Volunteers are invited for a research study about experiences communicating with native English speakers.

- ✓ Do you have a first language other than English?
- ✓ Do you feel comfortable speaking and listening in English?
- ✓ Do you speak with native English speakers on a regular basis?
- ✓ Do you work with native English speakers? or Have you worked with native English speakers in the past?

If you answered “yes” to these questions and are interested in talking about your experiences, please consider participating in this study.

There are small gift cards for everyone who participates in the study.

Please email Kate Rolander at kedaly@vcu.edu

or call **804-767-0402** for more information about participating!

Appendix D

Research Participant Information Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a form to you with information about the study and to inform you that participation is voluntary, to explain the risks and benefits of participation in the study, and to help you make a decision about whether or not to participate. We will cover this form carefully, and you are encouraged to ask the researcher any questions you have at any time.

Study Title: An Exploration of Identity Negotiation in Adult English Learners' Communities of Practice

Researcher and Title: Kathleen Daly Rolander, Doctoral Student

Department and Institution: School of Education, Virginia Commonwealth University

Contact Information: kedaly@vcu.edu, 804-767-0402 (cell) or 804-827-1946 (work)

I. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a study about the identities of adult English learners who interact with native English speakers. You have been selected as a possible participant in the study because

- English is not your first language,
- you have achieved an advanced level of English communication skills,
- you work or have worked outside of the home,
- you have participated in English-language instruction in the United States,
- and you are an adult.

From this study, the researcher hopes to learn more about how you have learned to communicate in English, paying particular attention to situations where you interact with native English speakers.

II. DESCRIPTION OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

1. You will meet with the researcher for three separate interviews, spaced six weeks apart. We will discuss questions related to your past and current social and professional activities, groups with whom you interact, and how you feel about your participation in those groups. We will also discuss goals and ideas for your future.
2. You will be asked to make weekly self-reports using either an audio-recorder or a written journal (both provided by the researcher). You will be asked to submit these self-reports to the researcher at the second and third interview meetings. The researcher will provide prompts at the first and second interviews for the self-reports, but the content of the weekly reports is up to you. You may include any information you find important. Depending on your preference, the researcher may send a text message, make a phone call, or send an email once a week to remind you about the self-reports.
3. At the second and third interview meetings, you will have the opportunity to either read or listen to researcher read the findings from the study up to that point and to give your feedback on how you feel about the researcher's data. You may disagree, agree, suggest additions, or suggest changes to anything she has written.

III. RISKS, BENEFITS, AND COSTS

It is unlikely that your involvement in this research project will cause you any risks or discomfort. However, talking about life experiences can be uncomfortable. You do not have to talk about any topics that you do not want to talk about, you may decline to answer any questions, and you may leave the research project at any time.

Upon completion of the third interview and a discussion of the self-reports, participants will receive a fifty-dollar Visa card in appreciation for their participation. Also, the information we learn from this study may provide us with new ways to help other adult English learners who participate in English-dominant groups. Also, many people find talking about their experiences helpful. There are no costs for participating in the study other than the time you will spend in the interviews and in recording the self-reports.

IV. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The data for this project will be kept confidential. At our first interview meeting, you will choose a pseudonym (a fake name) that will be used in all interview transcripts, researcher notes, self-report transcripts, and all reports and presentations about the study. This consent form is the only place where your real name will be.

All documents and audio files will be stored on an encrypted USB drive in a locked filing cabinet in my residence. Any hard copies of materials will be also kept in a locked filing cabinet. Transcripts of the interviews and self-reports will be kept for a minimum of five years after the

study, and all other data containing identifiable information will be destroyed upon completion of the research project. The researcher will be the only person with access to the data.

V. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

- Your participation in the research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no.
- You may change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study.
- You may choose not to answer any questions or to stop participating at any time.
- There is no penalty for withdrawing from the study.

If you decide to leave the study, you will have the option of requesting that any data you have provided be destroyed and not used in the project.

Your participation in the study may be stopped by the researcher at any time without your consent if you are unable to attend interview meetings or are unable to make the self-reports.

VI. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

If you have any questions or are concerned about your participation in the study, please contact Student Investigator

Kathleen Daly Rolander
School of Education, Virginia Commonwealth University
804-767-0402
kedaly@vcu.edu

OR

Faculty Instructor

Joan Rhodes, PhD
School of Education, Virginia Commonwealth University
jarhodes2@vcu.edu

VII. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in the research study and that you meet the criteria listed on the first page of this document.

This consent form also gives the researcher permission to contact you to schedule interviews and to send a weekly reminder for the self-reports. Please circle your preference for the contacts below and provide your contact information.

Preferred method of contact:

Text message _____

Phone call _____

Email _____

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Appendix E

Interview Protocols

**These questions represent the initial structure of the study and may be adapted as emerging themes present themselves through the research process.*

Interview 1

Topics: Past and current Communities of Practice (COPs), patterns of participation, and identity positions

A. Review information form, even if it has already been signed by the participant. Take time to introduce myself, talk informally, and to begin to establish a rapport.

B. Demographic data: First, we'll start with some general information about you.

1. Let's choose a pseudonym, a fake name, to use for the rest of the study.
2. What is your age?
3. How old were you when you moved to the United States?
 - a. Had you lived in another English-speaking country before coming here?
4. What is your native language?
 - a. Where are you from? Have you lived in other countries? Other places in the United States?
 - b. What other languages do you speak? How did you learn them?

5. Tell me about how you learned English.

C. Introduction to study: In these interviews, we want to learn more about how you interact with native English speakers and other English learners in your day-to-day life.

- Thinking back to where you consider home, can you describe a typical week, or a day?
For example, what kinds of things did you do? Who did you see on a regular basis?
- Thinking about your life now, can you talk about what you do during a typical day?
During a typical week? How is it different?
- Let's talk about the groups of people you interact with during a typical day or a typical week. Where do you interact with groups of people on a regular basis?
 - Work? English class?
 - Are there native English speakers at work? What about in other groups?
 - In these groups, what language(s) do you usually speak? If not English, why another language?
- Thinking specifically about the last two weeks, what kinds of conversations have you had with people in these groups? What kinds of things do you do with them? What language(s) do you use in these groups?
- How do you feel about your participation in the groups? When you speak, do you feel like others are listening to what you are saying? How can you tell this?
- Thinking about these last two weeks, have you recently felt like your participation or your opinions have been valued? Ignored? What happened in these situations?
- Are there other situations that you can think of where you felt valued or ignored because of language? What happened in those situations? How would you describe or talk about your participation with the other people in those situations?

D. Self-report prompt: Do you feel like a different person when you are in different groups of people? Think about the times and places you interact with native English speakers or other language learners, and think about your roles in these interactions. Based on how you are able to speak, offer opinions, and are listened to within your groups, how does your participation change between the people in these groups? How do you feel that your value within these groups changes? What kinds of situations make your participation change with other people? What happens in these situations?

Interview 2

A. Member-check 1 on initial findings from Interview 1: These are the things we learned from the first interviews. What are your reactions to them? How closely do they reflect your experiences and feelings? What seems true for you, and what seems different?

B. Reflections on self-report process: How did you feel doing the self-reports? What would you like to do with them during the second part of our study?

C. Current and future-oriented COPs, identity positions, and patterns of participation:

- Thinking about what we discussed last month about how we participate in groups of people, especially groups with native English speakers– and what you talked about in your self-reports - what do you feel about your value as a person when you interact in different groups? How does how you see yourself as a person in one group affect how you see yourself in other groups?
- What would you like your life to look like in the future – maybe in five years?
- What happens to your identity (how you feel about yourself) when you think about your future and what you want to do?

- Do your current groups of friends, co-workers help you with what you want to do in the future? How are they helpful? Are there times when they are not helpful? Can you talk about these situations?

D. Self-report prompts: Reflect on the ideas we discussed in this interview and in the interview last month. Over the next six weeks, think about what you feel happens to your identity (your sense of who you are) when you talk with others and participate in groups. When you think about your future goals.

Interview 3 Questions

A. Member-check 2 on initial findings from Interviews 1 and 2, as well as self-reports: These are the things we learned from the first interviews and the self-reports. What are your reactions to them? How closely do they reflect your experiences and feelings? What seems true for you, and what seems different?

B. Check-in: What other feelings do you have about how you interact in groups with native English speakers?

C. Impacts of the research process: Let's talk a little bit about this research process.

- What was this process like for you?
- Did it influence the way you think about yourself? About other people?

Appendix F

Table 2. Themes and Codes from Transcribed Interviews and Self-reflections

Table 2

Themes and Codes from Transcribed Interviews and Self-reflections

| Themes | Codes (number of occurrences) |
|-----------------------------|---|
| COPs ^a : Present | Afghan refugee group (6) |
| | Brazilian community (2) |
| | Children-based groups (5) |
| | Church (9) |
| | Customer service class at IRC (6) |
| | English class (27) |
| | Virtual spaces (10) |
| | Hobbies & activities (28) |
| | International Rescue Committee (6) |
| | Larger U.S. immigrant population (9) |
| | Meet-up groups (2) |
| | Mosque (6) |
| | Friends here in the United States (4) |
| | Spanish-speaking group in United States (9) |
| | Toastmasters (6) |

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|--|---|
| | <p>Work environments (22) International friend group (20) Volunteering (16)</p> |
| COPs ^a : Past | <p>Families in home countries (27) Friend groups in home countries (13) Work environments in home countries</p> |
| COPs ^a : Future | <p>Desired communities Educational aspirations (14) Friends in the United States (desired group) (23) Work (5)</p> |
| LPP ^b : Social and Structural Barriers | <p>Accent (20) American ignorance (3) American disinterest (19) Difficulty being understood (6) Difficulty of phone conversations (13) Difficulty understanding English (22) English as most important factor (17) Informal language and dialects (14) Lack of help from English speakers (4) Language isolation (18) Need for more education (12) Overwhelming information overload (6) Social isolation (18) Understanding humor and idioms (15)</p> |
| LPP ^b : Emotional and Personal Barriers | <p>Comfort talking with Americans (5) Confidence in communicating (13) Depression (10) Desperation (5) Fear of initiating contact (23) Fear of rejection (4) Frustration with inability to express themselves (12) Hurt feelings (7) Inability to focus on the future (12) Resourcefulness (6) Self-determination (22) Social rejection (11)</p> |
| Access to LPP | <p>Burden of communication (20) Cultural isolation (9) Difficulty finding friends (2) Help from English speakers (15) Lack of access to Americans (12) Lack of friendships (10) Need for social interaction (20) Patience (28) Recognition in a desired community (14) Service-oriented relationships (17)</p> |

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|------------------------------|--|
| Identity Negotiation | Avoiding home language (3) Cultural differences (8) Education in home country (12) English studies in home country (16) English interactions in home country (8) Expectations of life in the United States (18) Feeling culturally inferior (4) Feeling like a child (10) Feeling like you're starting over (12) Feeling stupid (21) Feeling trapped (12) Hopes for children in the United States (10) Motivation to return home (17) Motivation to stay in the United States (28) Non-belonging (10) Recognition as human beings from others (6) Self-perception as English speaker (17) Self-perception as stranger (11) Shifting identities (20) Stuck between cultures (17) |
| Agency | Advocacy as a language learner (7) Advocacy as an immigrant (15) Advocacy for self (17) Defending oneself with language (8) Political discussions (14) Racism (9) Stuck in current situation (12) Translating past experience (12) |
| English Instruction | Advice on learning English (11) Motivation for learning English (16) Critiques of language instruction (16) Need for listening practice (5) Lack of motivation to learn more (7) Lack of opportunities to practice (13) |
| Research-related reflections | Reflection on research process (18) Recorder use post-study (9) |

Note. Many of these codes fit into more than one category; in this table they are placed into the category with the highest number of occurrences and therefore the highest level of relevance.

^a COPs = Communities of Practice

^b LPP = Legitimate Peripheral Participation

