Title: The Transborder Identity Formation Process: An Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of Transfronterizo College Students from the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region

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The Transborder Identity Formation Process: An Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of Transfronterizo College Students from the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region

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Abstract: The purpose of this exploratory grounded theory study was to identify the transborder identity formation process among undergraduate students who lived a transborder lifestyle in the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region by identifying the factors that influenced the phenomenon. In the 1990s transnational and transborder individuals were identified by scholars as part of a new understanding for the movement of populations (Schiller, Basch, & Szanton Blanc, 1995). Today researchers state that this phenomenon is ever most prevalent at the world’s busiest international border shared between the cities of San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico. Part of the transborder phenomenon is college students who collaborate internationally between San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico because they reside on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border while attending higher education institutions in San Diego, California (Chávez Montaño, 2006 & Relaño Pastor, 2007). Currently there is no information about how many students lives a transborder lifestyle in the San Diego-Tijuana border region and few researchers have explored the understanding of their experiences. As a result, the lack of research about the development of this student population called for further investigation. In this study, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with twelve undergraduate students living a transborder lifestyle. Participants’ stories illustrated how their transborder identity formation was influenced by their transborder experiences. The influential factors of their transborder identity development are identified as the obstacles they faced through the transborder context and the different ways they coped with and adapted to the barriers of their milieu. A conceptual model illustrating the formation process of a transborder identity is presented.

Key words: Student Development in Higher Education, Transborder, Transfronteriz@, Transnationalism
Transborder interactions are a common way of life for many people who reside near the U.S.-Mexico International Border (Martinez, 1994; Vélez-Ibáñez, 2010). Particularly, the international border between the cities of San Diego, CA and Tijuana, Mexico is the most frequently crossed border in the world, with 50,000 northbound vehicle crossings and 25,000 northbound pedestrian crossings each day (San Ysidro Land Port of Entry, 2017). Families who keep ties in both nations and cities frequently cross the U.S.-Mexico international border and are central in the development of the unique transborder phenomenon in the San Diego-Tijuana border region (Ojeda, 2005; Ojeda, 2009). In particular, college students who live a transborder lifestyle in the San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico border region live and commute to both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border while attending higher education institutions in San Diego, California (Chávez Montaño, 2006; Relaño Pastor, 2007). Previous scholars who have studied students that live a transborder lifestyle have culturally identified the student group as transfronterizos [transborder] as a result of their transborder ties to both nations—Mexico and the United States (Chávez Montaño, 2006; Relaño Pastor, 2007). Transfronterizo college students’ ties to both nations and their transborder lifestyle are significant experiences which contribute to their cultural identity and their academic experiences. However, there is no information about how many college students live a transborder lifestyle in the San Diego-Tijuana border region (Relaño Pastor, 2007) and few researchers have explored their experiences (Chávez Montaño, 2006 & Relaño Pastor, 2007). As a result, the purpose of this study was to explore the transborder identity formation process among transfronterizo college students from the San Diego-Tijuana border region by identifying the factors in their environment that influenced their identity. A transborder identity is defined by how transfronterizo college students thought and felt about their identity in relation their experiences in the U.S.-Mexico border, and their transborder interactions.

**Literature Review**

Identity Development is described as a socially constructed process (McEwen, 2003) where demographic characteristics provided by a social context inform our sense of self, sense of being and sense of interaction with others (Erikson, 1959). In order to gain a deeper understanding of the identity formation process of college students who live a transborder lifestyle, I will present a literature review that illustrates the environment in which transborder communities near the U.S.-Mexico border live in, research on transfronterizo college students and the concept of transborder citizens, which is used to describe the transborder population in the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region (Iglesias-Prieto, 2011/2014).

**Transborder Phenomenon**

The transborder phenomenon from the U.S.-Mexico border region is conditioned by the characteristics of the U.S.-Mexico international border, the nations of the United States and
Mexico, and the people who frequently cross the international border and collaborate in both nations. Transborder phenomena around the world are different and unique to each region, because not all borders are the same. The U.S.-Mexico International Border is an interdependent border where transborder collaboration between economic and human resources is encouraged by both nations (Martinez, 1994). At the same time, the U.S.-Mexico International Border is also highly monitored, policed and militarized by central governments and it is kept open only to serve “national agendas” (Martinez, 1994, p.9). Particularly, this is the type of environment that transfronterizo college students frequently encounter when they cross the U.S.-Mexico international Border.

Martinez (1994) conceptual analysis about the U.S.-Mexico border region illustrates the environment in which individuals who live a transborder lifestyle live in. Martinez (1994) described four characteristics of the borderland context that shape the culture and sociological experiences of people who live near the border land and called these characteristics “the borderlands milieu” (p.10). While all residents of the U.S.-Mexico border region are exposed to different levels of the neighboring country, most individuals experience, to some degree, “transnational interaction, international conflict and accommodation, ethnic conflict and accommodation, and separateness” (Martinez, 1994; p. 10). The characteristics of the borderland context illustrate the type of environment that transborder individuals are engaged in. Moreover, although the borderland context is a significant element of the transborder phenomenon, the transborder phenomenon would not exist if it were not for the people who are frequently involved in both nations.

Transfronterizo College Students from the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region

Few researches have explore the experiences of college students who live a transborder lifestyle in the San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico border region (Chávez Montaño, 2006; Relaño Pastor, 2007). In a qualitative study, researcher Relaño Pastor (2007) analyzed 40 one-on-one interviews from high school and college transfronterizo students and found that students formed their identity by interacting with diverse social networks in high school and higher education institutions in San Diego, California. Similarly, researcher Chávez Montaño (2006) also studied the experiences of 40 college students and alum from higher education institutions in San Diego, California who lived a transborder lifestyle in the U.S.-Mexico border region. In this study, Chávez Montaño provided a conceptual framework for the systematic understanding of the cultural capital transfronterizo college students students accumulated through their transborder interactions in the San Diego-Tijuana border region.

Both Relaño Pastor (2007) and Chávez Montaño (2006) described the identity of the participants of their studies who lived a transborder lifestyle. However, while the focus of their research studies was to explore the cultural capital (Chávez Montaño) and social interactions (Relaño Pastor) of students who lived a transborder lifestyle the identity formation process of participants was not systematically explored. The following concepts, transborderism and
Transborder citizens shed more light to understanding how transborder interactions influence the identities of transborder individuals (Iglesias-Prieto, 2011/2014).

Transborder Citizens

Iglesias Prieto (2011/2014) coined the term transborderism to define four different levels of transborder interactions among people who cross the U.S.-Mexico border, ranging from level one: basic, to level four: intense and complex. Iglesias Prieto states that people who are in the level four of transborderism are transborder citizens who are deeply and intensely engaged in transborder interactions. Iglesias-Prieto (2011/2014) explains that transborder citizens frequently cross the U.S.-Mexico international border and are fully integrated in both, the Mexican and American cultures and societies. Transborder citizens typically live, study or work in both sides of the border and usually cross the international border at an almost daily basis. Iglesias-Prieto (2011/2014) further explains that transborder citizens are deeply and intensely engaged in transborder interactions and are more critically self-aware of everyday realities of their border living. Particularly, their everyday realities as transborder citizens significantly influence their identities. Likewise, as transborder citizens, transfronterizo college students are active participants in the transborder phenomenon and their identities are significantly influenced by their transborder interactions.

Purpose and Research Questions

Currently there is no conceptual model that systematically illustrates the identity formation process of transborder individuals. As a result, the purpose of this study is to identify the transborder identity formation process of transfronterizo college students the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region by identifying the factors in their environment that influenced their identity. The primary research question guiding this study is: How does a transborder lifestyle influence the formation of a transborder identity among transfronterizo college students from the San Diego-Tijuana border region? The primary research question is guided by the following two secondary research questions:

1. What are the factors that influence the formation process of a transborder identity among transfronterizo college students from the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region?

2. What is the essence and underlining structure of a transborder identity among transfronterizo college students from the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region?
Methodology

This is an exploratory, grounded theory study (Creswell, 2007) and a total of twelve Transfronterizo college students participated in semi-structured one-on-one open-ended interviews. According to Best and Kahn (2016), interviews are used to collect information on participants’ perspectives, feelings and experiences. The purpose of an interview-based study is to access the perspectives of the participants who are being interviewed by focusing on their descriptions of their experiences (Patton, 1990). A grounded theory research design and semi-structured one-on-one open-ended interviews was the most appropriate methodological approach to answer the research questions of this study because, through this process, I was be able to collect information on participates’ perspectives about their transborder interactions and identities.

Site

The research site was a four-year public higher education institution. In order to keep the higher education institution anonymous, it was assigned the pseudonym Sunny University. Similarly, the participants of this study also chose pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy. Sunny University is located in San Diego, CA, in close proximity of the U.S.-Mexico international border. Currently, the university services approximately 30,000 students; however, Sunny University has no records on the enrollment of transfronterizo college students from the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region.

Recruitment

To recruit participants, I used snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a technique used to find potential participants through other participants who are most likely to identify subjects who fit the required characteristics for the study (Best & Kahn, 2016). The same process continues with new participants until a researcher is able to reach the desired sample size. Through snowball sampling, I tapped into the transfronterizo student population at Sunny University, by recruited students during the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters through courses under the departments of Sociology, Latin American Studies and Chicano and Chicana Studies. With the instructors’ permission, I invited students who were part of the transborder community to participate in this study by asking professors teaching the courses under the various departments to send the recruitment letter and announcement of this study to students enrolled in their classes. I also made announcements in person during class meetings and students received the recruitment letters and announcement flyers in hard copy. I also administered a questioner to determine if students fit the description of members of the transborder community. The students who were selected to participate in this study were students who reported they lived in both, Tijuana, Mexico and San Diego, CA or traveled between both nations frequently.
Participants

The 12 participants of this study were between 18-26 years of age. The participants were a heterogeneous group that varied in cultural identification, ethnicity and transborder interactions. Table 1 and Table 2 provide a detail description of the demographic characteristics, academic experience and transborder interactions of the participants of this study. Most students ethically identified as Latino/a and two students identifies as Latino/a and White. Culturally, five students identified as Transborder and two students identified as Tijuanense. Two students culturally identified as Mexican-American and the rest of the students each culturally identified as Mexican, Mexican and American, and Hispanic or Latino/a. All students were U.S.-citizens, 10 students were Born U.S.-citizens and two students were naturalized U.S.-citizens. Most participants were enrolled in 12 or more units with the exception of one student who was a graduating senior enrolled in 9 units. All students engaged in transborder interactions between San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico and varied in the frequency that they crossed the border from once a week to every day. All the participants of this study experienced obstacles through the transborder context and their transborder lifestyle. Their experiences are further illustrated in the findings section of this study.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Ethnic Identification</th>
<th>Cultural Identification</th>
<th>American Generational Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Naturalized US Citizen</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Tijuanense</td>
<td>0.5 Gen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Born US Citizen</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Transfronterizo/Transborder</td>
<td>1st Gen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Born US Citizen</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latina</td>
<td>1st Gen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Naturalized US Citizen</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>1st Gen. Mexican, 2nd Gen. America; Mom is a U.S. citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Born US Citizen</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Transfronterizo/Transborder</td>
<td>2nd Gen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaz</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Naturalized US Citizen</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Transfronterizo/Transborder</td>
<td>0.5 Gen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Born US Citizen</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Mexican and American</td>
<td>1st Gen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Number of Units Enrolled</td>
<td>What Days do you attend class?</td>
<td>How many days a week do you spend in Tijuana?</td>
<td>How many days a week do you spend in San Diego?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alonso</td>
<td>9 (graduating this semester)</td>
<td>Tue. &amp; Thu.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mon.-Fri.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mon.-Fri.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mon.-Fri.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mon.-Thu.</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mon.-Thu.</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamalion</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mon.-Fri.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mon.-Fri.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaz</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mon.-Thu.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mon.-Fri.</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulipan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tue. &amp; Thu.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mon.-Fri.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Academic Experience and Transborder Interactions**

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

In this qualitative study, I used open-ended one-on-one interviews to answer the primary and secondary research questions of this study. Through the use of open-ended interviews, participants are able to articulate thoughts about their experiences and beliefs (Best & Kahn, 2016). During the interviews participants expressed their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and experiences about their identities and living a transborder lifestyle in the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region. Before the interviews participants received an Institutional Research Review Border (IRB) approved consent form emphasizing the confidentiality of their participation in the study. All recruitment materials in this study were approved by IRB. The interviews were facilitated on campus during a time that best fit the students’ schedule. The interviews were also conducted at a place on campus where students felt comfortable to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Students were also given the option to participate in the interview at another location if they wished.
Trustworthiness and Credibility

In this qualitative study, I took various measures to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the results. Internal validity in qualitative research is the accuracy, trustworthiness and credibility of the information collected by matching the data to the reality of the circumstances that are being explored (Best & Kahn, 2016). Researchers can enhance the internal validity of their study through member checking (Creswell, 2007). Implementing member checking in a study allows participants to review the information developed as a result of their collaboration in the interview process. To enhance the internal validity of my study I asked participants to review the accuracy of my analysis of their interviews. Researchers also ensure the validity of their study by using peer review and discussing their findings with a knowledgeable member in their field of study (Clark & Creswell, 2010). In my study I used peer review by discussing the codes and themes of my study with professors in the field of student development in higher education.

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study was obtained through open-ended one-on-one interviews and analyzed through a grounded theory research approach. The interviews were transcribed using a transcribing services agency and I checked the accuracy of the transcriptions by reviewing all transcripts. I analyzed the data through line-by-line coding and thematic coding with the qualitative data analysis software system INvivo10. The interviews were first analyzed through open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) by coding the interview for major categories. Then axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was applied by identifying open coding categories that illustrated the formation process of a transborder identity. Then the data was further refined through a constant comparative method of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A model of the findings is presented in the following section of this study, describing the formation process of a transborder identity through the voices of the participants illustrated through quotes.

Findings and Emerging Theory

The feeling, thoughts and experiences that transfronterizo college students from the San Diego-Tijuana border region shared during their one-on-one interviews revealed how they experienced the formation process of transborder identity. The participants of this study were a heterogeneous group that lived a transborder lifestyle in various different forms, yet shared similar experiences in the formation process of their transborder identities. The grounded theory in this study emerged from the relationship between three major themes: (a) Obstacles Through the Transborder Context, (b) Transborder Identity Influential Factors, and (c) Transborder Identity Formation. The obstacles students experienced through the transborder context influenced how students coped with and adapted to the challenges they faced. The different
ways students coped with and adapted to the obstacles influenced the formation process of a transborder identity among the participants. The following quotes from the participants are used to illustrate each of the themes, categories and sub-categories that are part of the transborder identity theory.

**Obstacles Through the Transborder Context**

Transnationalism is influenced by an individual’s desire to belong to multiple locations (Gilroy, 1993; Cohen, 1996); and this concept is a universal link among transnational populations around the world. However, transborder populations around the world are not all the same and they are influenced by the unique regional context of the borderland (Martinez, 1994). Transborder individuals from the U.S.-Mexico border form part of a regional phenomenon that is unique to the international territory shared by the two nations (Ojeda, 2005; Ojeda 2009). In particular, the international border between the cities of San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico is an interdependent border where the movement of people is highly policed and militarized (Martinez, 1994). As a result, the characteristics of the border influence the experiences of transborder populations in this region. In this study, despite the participants’ desire to belong to both nations, they experience various obstacles through the Transborder Context.

The following three categories illustrate students’ motivations to live a transborder lifestyle and the obstacles they experienced: (a) Transborder Context, (b) Contextual Obstacles and (c) Political Obstacles. *Transborder context* refers to the factors that motivated participants to live a transborder lifestyle. However, to a certain degree they all experienced contextual obstacles and political obstacles. The *contextual obstacles* they experienced were related to the U.S.-Mexico international border. The *political obstacles* they experienced were related to simultaneously living in two different nations and the exclusion and discrimination they faced in both countries.

**Transborder context.** Similar to the individuals described in the literature, the participants of this study engaged in transborder experiences because of their desire to belong to multiple locations. All twelve participants in this study had the desire to socially interact with their friends and family in Tijuana, Mexico and to attend Sunny University in San Diego, California. Students' academic experiences and social interactions were two influential factors that encouraged them to live a transborder lifestyle in the U.S.-Mexico border region despite the obstacles along the way. For example, Francisco rents an apartment across the street from Sunny University, and crosses the U.S.-Mexico border frequently to visit his family who lives in Tijuana. Francisco explained that crossing the border was frustrating because of the long wait time, traffic and constant interrogations from U.S. customs agents. However, his motivation in facing the challenges of the border commute was to see his family in Tijuana. Similarly, Tulipan shared how she was motivated to live a transborder lifestyle because of her desire to have her
higher education experience in San Diego despite the obstacles she encounters every day to arrive at Sunny University, coming from Tijuana. Tulipan tells her story:

I like how I am because I don’t give up … I’m happy because I like to study here and I don’t care if I have to go to another country every day… But sometimes it’s hard, one time I cut the border [Line] and some Mexican police officers caught me and took my backpack. They told me they were not going to give me my backpack until I started all the way [in] the back of the line. I got my backpack back and when the police officers turned around I ran all the way to the front of the line and I crossed… I had to persist because I really want to get here early, because I don’t like to be late and I don’t like to miss class. If I quit when he got my backpack and I just go and do the line, I was not going to be able to be here on time. My goal is to be here so I try again and go… even though there is a border, I know that’s not going to be a barrier for me, I know I’m going to graduate even if I have to go through that every day.

Like Francisco, Tulipan’s desire to attend higher education in San Diego was a motivating factor to engage in a transborder lifestyle. However, they experienced the obstacles differently from each other. For example, Francisco was able to live across the street from campus and he crossed the border frequently by car to visit his family in Tijuana. In contrast, Tulipan lived with her family in Tijuana, because she could not afford housing in San Diego and crossed the border every day to continue to pursue her studies in the U.S. and attend Sunny University. Economic hardship was another factor that influenced students to engage in a transborder lifestyle, for example American and her family lived in Tijuana because they could not afford the cost of living in San Diego, however she continued her studies in San Diego by crossing the border daily. Her story is further illustrated in the following section.

**Contextual obstacles.** All participants shared experiences of overwhelming obstacles due to the U.S.-Mexico International border during their efforts to live a transborder lifestyle in San Diego and Tijuana. For example, some students experienced unstable living situations, difficulties due to lack of time, and perceived the border to be a dividing element between their friends and family members. For example, America is currently eighteen years of age and a college student in San Diego. Since the age of 16, over the last couple of years, she has experienced an unstable living situation during her efforts to attend high school and college in San Diego. America illustrated her and her father’s unstable living situation:

He used to have a house but he lost it. We were homeless for a period of time. Right now we are trying to buy a new house… I borrowed an address from my godmother and I was crossing the border for six months and then I moved in with her, but we never declared ourselves as homeless… I moved back to Tijuana because we can’t afford to pay rent and bills, and everything… I don’t have family here; I’m the only one…
While America’s family moved to Mexico, currently she continues to attend school in San Diego despite an unstable living situation. She continued to attend Sunny University because of her desire to continue her college education in the United States. Other students who live in San Diego and cross the border to visit family in Tijuana also find it difficult to live in multiple locations. For example, Jazz lives with her parents in San Diego and also lives in Tijuana because she visits friends and works on art projects in Tijuana while also attending Sunny University. Jazz is driven to live a transborder lifestyle because of the possibility of socially interacting with friends and family in both nations. However, Jazz has encountered an unstable living through her experience of living a transborder lifestyle between the two nations.

At other times, students have found their transborder lifestyle and the U.S.-Mexico international border to be a division of their friends and family members. While family and friends were a factor that drove students to live a transborder lifestyle, they also found it challenging to maintain relationships. For example, Alonso described how he viewed the border at one point in his life, when asked what he found most challenging about simultaneously living in two different nations: “Things happened and I had to move to San Diego. At that time, I saw the border as a division of my family because I couldn’t go to visit them, because I would have to spend four hours at the border waiting to cross the border.” Jane also had similar thoughts about the border as an obstacle when she was asked how being in two different nations simultaneously influenced her social network. Jane shared her thoughts:

I have family on both sides, but my parents and my sister are in Tijuana, so it’s hard to not see them that often, even though we’re so close to each other… Border wise it’s hard, because I have to cross the border and deal with long lines and traffic…

Although Jane lived a transborder lifestyle because of her desire to see her family and attend Sunny University, she found it difficult to cross the border.

All participants in this study expressed that they experienced difficulties through the transborder commute at some point in their lives. While the nature of their transborder lifestyle was to frequently enter both nations, all students experienced commuting for several hours through the U.S.-Mexico international border. However, some students crossed by car, as is the case of Francisco, described earlier, and other students crossed by foot and public transportation, as is the case of Tulipan. While students crossed the border at different frequencies and through different forms of transportation, all students perceived the time spent commuting through the international border as an obstacle at some point in their lives. In addition, the lack of time they had as a result of spending many hours in the U.S.-Mexico international border also interfered with other aspects of their lives, such as their academic success at Sunny University.

Another obstacle college students encountered through the interdependent border and their transborder lifestyle was national conflict from both the American and Mexican nations. Students experienced different types of national conflict and they found it challenging because they were obstacles that inhibited their ability to cross the U.S.-Mexico border and engage in
transborder collaboration in both nations. For example, Carla describes how the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks upon the United States in New York City and Washington made it complicated for her to cross the U.S.-Mexico border because of the increased security at the international port of entry in San Diego. Carla explained, “When 9/11 happened, the twin tower tragedy, yes, we had to wait there from 6:00 in the morning, and then leave our car on the other side, and then cross over walking with all our book bags and everything….” In Carla’s case, the heightened security at the U.S.-Mexico international port of entry, as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S., complicated her efforts to live a transborder lifestyle between San Diego and Tijuana. She explained that she had to choose to live only in San Diego.

After the tragedy of 9/11 in the U.S., Mexico, too, had its share of national conflict. In 2008, Drug wars, rampant kidnappings and killings became prevalent in Mexico, predominantly in the border regions, such as Tijuana (Kun, 2012). Another member of my study, Alonso, explained how he was not able to cross from San Diego to Tijuana because of his parents’ concerns with the increased crime rate in Mexico. Alonso further explains his experience, “In my case, I felt really weird because at that time I was living in San Diego and they (transfronterizo peers) were always going to Tijuana, and my parents wouldn’t let me go to Tijuana because the crime rates were really high… I had to stay in San Diego all the time.” Similar to Carla, Alonso could not engage in transborder experiences because of national conflict. The national conflict Carla and Alonso experienced was at different times and different locations from where they lived a transborder lifestyle; however, both incidents affected and inhibited their transborder lifestyles.

**Political obstacles.** Lack of understanding from people who were not part of the transborder community, discrimination and exclusion were obstacles students encountered in both nations. Melisa spoke specifically about the lack of understanding from outsiders of the transborder community:

> They don’t see the struggle, they don’t live it, or they don’t know about the struggle that the transborder community goes through. That’s one of the biggest challenges for us, because they don’t identify with us, because they don’t know how it’s like….It’s like a secret background of ours, our struggles. Many people live here all their life and they don’t have a single idea of how it’s like for us, our way of living. It’s not that they don’t want to see it, it’s just they don’t know how to see it.

When Melisa was asked what she found most challenging about simultaneously growing up in two nations, she expressed that it was the lack of understanding by members who are not part of the transborder community. She described this experience as a form of marginalization from those who live only in either the American or the Mexican society, because they are not able to see or know about the transborder community and they could not understand their experiences and obstacles. For instance, Alonso stated that he faces discrimination from both the Mexican and American societies. He shared his story:
If I’m in Mexico, they see me as an American because I live here and I go to school here and I work here. If I’m here, they see me as Mexican because I grew up in Mexico and I look Mexican and I have an accent…But I would say that I’m a transborder person. Family members tell me, “Oh, your opinion is not valid because you’re an American…” They call me names and I don’t really like it. I feel like I’m Mexican because I grew up in Mexico, that’s the culture I grew up in… Here, I’ve been called beaner or wetback and stuff like that. But I don’t get offended…I just ignore those people…But those words, I feel like the meaning of the word…I don’t care about the meaning of the word, but it hurts when people say it with the purpose of hurting people.

Similar to Melisa, Alonso also expressed how members of the American and the Mexican societies do not understand the transborder culture. While Melisa attributed people's lack of understanding of the transborder culture to their inability to “see” the experiences of members of this culture, Alonso attributed their discrimination to their “ignorance”. Although Melisa and Alonso both understood why and how people were prejudiced, they still found their experiences with the lack of understanding and discrimination from individuals who were not part of the transborder community as challenging. In particular, Melisa found the experiences of exclusion be one of the “biggest challenges” she encountered as a member of the transborder culture; likewise, Alonso found the discrimination he faced as hurtful, because people used prejudice words to specifically exclude and “hurt” him.

Another political obstacle transfronterizo college students faced was exclusion from individuals who were not part of the transborder community. In particular, students felt the pressure to speak English and Spanish proficiently in order to avoid exclusion when dealing with members who were not part of the transborder community. For example, Carla explained that it is important to speak English and Spanish clearly because, if she mixed both languages while speaking in Tijuana she would not be accepted by her peers and she would "get picked on." Another member of my study, Yolanda, explained how speaking English in Tijuana labeled her as different from her peers who were not from the transborder culture. “For example, when I hang out with the ones that live there and work there in Mexico, when I say words in English that they don’t usually say or know, that I say when I am at my school and stuff like that, it makes a difference and it’s a noticeable difference.” Carla refrained from mixing English and Spanish in Tijuana to avoid getting “picked on” by her Mexican peers; and, similarly, Yolanda refrained from speaking English words, which she would normally use in school, to avoid being marked as different from her peers in Tijuana. Yolanda also describes how she and her peers from the transborder community found it important to speak English as fluently as her peers in San Diego.
Transborder Identity: Influential Factors

Transfronterizo college students experienced various obstacles through their transborder lifestyle in the San Diego-Tijuana border region. In order to overcome the obstacles they faced, they coped and adapted in various ways. The influential factors of the formation of a transborder identity among transfronterizo college students were: (1) **Coping with Obstacles through Unity** and (2) **Adapting to Obstacles**. **Coping with Obstacles through Unity** refers to a bond and connection students shared based on their shared struggle through the transborder context and experiences in both nations. Students coped with the obstacles they experienced by creating an inclusive environment with each other based on the understanding and empathy about the obstacles they experienced through their transborder lifestyle. **Coping with Obstacles through Unity** also influences how students adapted to the obstacles they experienced. However, students ultimately overcame the obstacles they experienced through the transborder context by adapting to the challenges. More specifically, **Adapting to Obstacles** refers to how students modified and changed their thoughts and actions to overcome the barriers they experienced in their efforts to live a transborder lifestyle.

**Coping with obstacles through unity.** All of the participants in this study experienced, in different ways, a sense of unity and bond with members whom they perceived to be part of the transborder culture. For example, Gamalión’s thoughts further illustrated this idea:

> We really identify, we become almost as brothers. I try to help them as much as I can, if I drive a car over here and I’m with them and I know they ride the trolley I give them rides. I try to help them as much as I can and everybody is the same, it’s like a brotherhood I guess, they just want to help each other because they know it’s hard, so they just try to make it easier for you.

The basis of Gamalión’s sense of “brotherhood” highlights how his experience is influenced by the obstacles he and other transborder members faced through the transborder context. America also shared a similar bond with other transfronterizo college students: “Those who have experience doing that have helped me out. They taught me that I’m not the only one doing this… For example, they tell me to be patient, get early to the line…try to drink coffee if you’re tired.” Gamalión and America both confirmed experiencing a bond, unity, and connectivity with other transborder members and students who, like them, also faced obstacles through the transborder context. Moreover, both students illustrate how, through unity, they were able to cope with and adapt to many of the obstacles they experienced. Jazz’s experience further supports the idea that unity helped transfronterizo students of this study adapt to the obstacles in their environment.

> It’s not just me; it’s a whole bunch of us doing the same exact thing. So we understand what we’re all going through and we help each other out…Like crossing the border with a motorcycle, I have told many of my acquaintances that I’ve been doing…Sometimes
it’s just too hard, you can’t take it anymore and you mentioned options or possibilities, things that they can do to make the most out of it.

Gamalion, America and Jazz illustrated how and why they experienced a bond, unity, and a connection with other students and members of the transborder community. The stories the students shared also illustrated how they began to learn about adapting to the contextual obstacles of their environment.

Unity also helped participants of this study to cope with the political obstacles they experienced through their transborder lifestyle, such as discrimination, exclusion and lack of understanding from members of both the American and Mexican societies who were not part of the transborder community. Although members outside of their community did not understand their experiences, transfronterizo students were able to express their understanding with each other through unity. For example, Yolanda, who is biracial, talks about how she has coped with exclusion by being accepted by other transfronterizo college students: “I guess that’s the people who I feel more connected to, cause I have friends that are like in T.J. that live there, study there, everything there, to them I'm like the white one and when I'm here like with white people, I'm like the Mexican one…. ” Yolanda further explained how she is more connected to other transfronterizo college students because they do not exclude her because she is biracial. Rather, she describes how they are similar because they “cross” the border.

Although, students expressed how they experienced a bond, unity, and connection in different forms, they all shared a sense of unity with experiences relating to the transborder context and their transborder lifestyle. For example, Melisa explained that the “main reason” why she identified with other transfronterizo students was because she had “experienced living in two places.” Tulipan further elaborated on how she felt connected with other transfronterizo college students because of their similar challenges as a result of living “in two countries” and “crossing the border” every day.

Almost all students experienced some kind of unity, bond, and connection with one another as transfronterizo students; however, a couple of students did not identify with other transfronterizo college students, because of the differences in their border crossing experiences. For example, Tulipan who crossed the border daily expressed how she did not identify with other transfronterizo college student who “didn’t cross the border every day” like her, because “they did not struggle like [she did].” Although unity influenced how students adapted through the obstacles they faced, not all students experienced unity the same way.

Adapting to obstacles. Students overcame the obstacles they experienced through the transborder context and their transborder lifestyles by adapting to the barriers they faced. The process of adaptation was also a way to cope with the obstacles of their environment. Students began the process of adaptation to cope with the obstacles of their environment and, once students adapted, the obstacles of their environment were transformed into experiences that they were able to manageable. Although the obstacles they experienced through the transborder
context were still difficult, after they experienced adaptation, the obstacles they faced were no longer barriers to their efforts to live a transborder lifestyle.

Students intentionally changed the way they acted and thought in order to overcome the obstacles of their environment. For example, students adapted to the obstacles of their environment by eliminating the border wait, managing their time, planning for unexpected circumstances, and intentionally blending into the American and Mexican societies. As a result, students adapted to the contextual obstacles and political obstacles they experienced. In the following two categories, I further illustrate the concept of adapting to obstacles through the voices of the participants.

Adapting to contextual obstacles. Overall, the most transformational adaptation students made was eliminating the border wait. Through this process, students engaged in physical acts to eliminate the border wait and also developed thinking patterns that figuratively erased the border wait. While students physically and figuratively eliminated the border, they also overcame the contextual obstacles of their environment. Gamalion describes his process of coping, changing, and adapting to crossing the border and eliminating the border wait:

> It was hard for me but I had to cope with the changing of the border crossing, so at first I had to cross walking because I didn’t have a car, then I coped by crossing with my car but then that didn’t make it for me because it was four hours, so I coped more with it and I bought a motorcycle, so now I do like five minutes crossing the border… You have to keep modifying to what comes and also it is a longer ride from Tijuana to [Sunny University] so I needed to know the fastest and cheapest way that I could get here. So, I had to learn how to drive a motorcycle because of the border.

Gamalion’s thoughts support the idea that students begin the process of adaptation in order to cope with the obstacles of their environment.

Alonso describes a similar experience of eliminating the border wait. In his case, he adapted by obtaining the Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) pass, which allowed him to cross the border through a quicker inspection point. Alonso also illustrated how eliminating the border wait made it easier for him to see his family. At one point in our interview, he had described how he viewed the border as a “division” of his family because he could not go visit them. However, even though he describes that he still views the border as a divider of his family, he explains that with the SENTRI pass, for him, the “border has been erased.” In Alonso’s situation, eliminating the border wait has helped him overcome the obstacle of being divided from his family. In addition, eliminating the border wait also helped him overcome an unstable living situation. For example, he described how before having the SENTRI pass, he had to pack to stay in Tijuana, Mexico for several days because he had to spend a long time in the border, but now that he has the SENTRI pass, he can come and go the same day.
The participants of this study also adapted to the obstacles they experienced through the transborder context by managing their time and planning for the unexpected. For example, Yolanda explains how she adapted her time to the border wait: “I study when I have to wait for hours. I take my flash cards and I study in the car... When I started doing that, I would plan my day or my week, actually... So now I'm more cautious with my time”. While the border wait was an obstacle Yolanda faced, she overcame that barrier by changing her behavior and adapting her time at the border. As a result, the border wait was transformed to a time where she also studied for her classes. Tulipan experienced a similar situation as she adapted her class schedule to allow herself more time in the mornings to sleep and cross the border. Tulipan explains her situation, “That affected my grades, because I failed one class. It was the border. When I got tired and I didn’t do the homework. Last semester I got my classes at 10:00 A.M. and I did sleep more than a couple of hours... and I got my first A’s.” In Tulipan’s situation, the border wait was interfering with her academic performance; however, she coped with the obstacle by adapting her schedule to a later time in order to allow her more time to sleep and cross the border in the mornings.

Other students adapted to the unpredictable nature of the border wait by changing the way they thought about their time and planning for the unexpected. For example, Carla described how she changed her “mind set” in order to adapt to the unpredictable circumstances of crossing the border. Carla adapted her schedule by planning more time for unpredictable events that might occur as a result of crossing the border. In Carla’s experience, “expecting the unexpected” was part of her “daily routine” and she adjusted her schedule with extra time for unexpected events. Similar to Carla, other students also adjusted their way of thinking about the unpredictable commute time of the border in order to overcome the obstacle of the unexpected nature of crossing the international border.

**Political obstacles.** The political obstacles student faced were specifically related to the exclusion and discriminations they experienced while living a transborder lifestyle in both nations. Consequently, students socially adapted to blend in to mainstream American and Mexican cultures to avoid exclusion and discrimination from members of who were not members of the transborder community. Yolanda describes how she would adjust to and blend in with her American and Mexican peers:

I used to like hang out with the people that were in a similar position as me... Like mixing the language. That would be fine and we wouldn’t care. But like if you went to Mexico with your friends from there, you couldn’t do that because they would ask, “why are you speaking like that”. You couldn’t do it with the Americans either because they wouldn’t understand Spanish... So you kind of adjust yourself a little bit... When you’re with the Americans or the Mexicans, you kind of have to blend with them... You also know the structure, you know the rules and how everyone is and you kind of adjust to it... Not because you’re trying too... You kind of know that that’s how it is so you... fit more into that place...
Yolanda explained that she had to adjust her natural way of speaking when interacting with her Mexican or American peers, because if she would use English and Spanish words, they would not understand her. Yolanda also explained that adjusting and blending in was something that she experienced because she understood the “structure” and “rules” of how her peers socially interacted. Melissa shared a similar experience:

I can fit into different types of societies so I think that’s beneficial to me…Especially knowing both languages, it’s something that not everyone can be able to do…You experience the difference and it’s something that, it’s part of me already. Just being able to distinguish, the other culture and it’s just a part of the people like us that are raised in both cultures. We have, let’s say, that ability to adapt and still fit in a sense. It’s just part of us.

Yolanda and Melissa explained that adapting to and fitting into the Mexican and the American cultures is a “natural” and easy experience. However, not all participants in this study thought that adapting and adjusting to fit in with their American and Mexican peers was easy or natural. For example, in Daniel’s experience, his parents are Mexican-American and White-American and he learned both English and Spanish at a very young age. However, he explains that his native language is Spanish because that is the language that he grew-up with when interacting with his peers in Tijuana. As a result, he explained that he found it “awkward” to socialize with his American peers. Nevertheless, he tried to “study” different social groups in order to be a part of the group, but socializing did not “feel as natural” as when he was with his peers in Tijuana.

Francisco also described how he would adapt to the American and Mexican cultures. However, in his experience, he adapted to avoid discrimination and harassment. For Francisco adapting to the Mexican and American societies meant blending in and “not calling attention” to himself in either culture. In particular, Francisco explained that blending into the American and Mexican cultures was necessary if he wanted to be safe from crime in Mexico and discrimination in the United States. Francisco explained that he addressed the subject of adapting to the American and Mexican societies in different ways. For example, in Mexico, he would not dress nicely to avoid getting mugged and in San Diego, he would not carry a Mexican flag in order to avoid discrimination. Overall, Francisco explained that he understood what he needed to avoid doing in order to blend into the American culture and the Mexican culture.

Transborder Identity Formation

The central theme of this study is transborder identity and it is informed by six different categories. The process of forming a transborder identity was informed by students’ interactions with obstacles through the transborder context, coping with obstacles through unity, and adapting
to obstacles. The six categories that illustrate a transborder identity are briefly described with participants’ thoughts as illustrations:

**Unique.** The first category was the recognition that their experiences through the transborder context and their transborder lifestyle were different from those of their Mexican and American peers. This first category was influenced by the exclusion they faced from their peers who were not part of the transborder community. Alonso explained: “For example, when I talk to Americans, I tell them that I go to Mexico or that I go every week and they ask me: ‘Aren’t you American or aren’t you Mexican-American, don’t you have to stay here?’ I feel like, in a way, I’m different from everyone else because of those elements.” Alonso’s understanding of being unique or “different” was external and influenced by his peers’ lack of understanding. Similarly, Jane talked about how she thought she was different because her peers did not understand the challenges she experienced through a transborder lifestyle. “I guess it’s a little bit different. Just for example, my friends that are Mexican, they don’t get it that it’s hard for me to deal with crossing the border and then coming to school over here…” In this category, transfronterizo students explained that their peers who were not part of the transborder culture did not understand their challenges because they did not experience crossing the border.

**In-Between.** The second category was influenced by students’ awareness of being different and unique. Participants described thought of being between cultures, societies and nations; and explained that they felt like they did not belong anywhere. Alonso shared his thoughts:

I’m between two countries and I don’t know if I’m Mexican or if I’m American…with my family, I’m not considered Mexican because they grew up in Mexico and they see me as an American. When I’m here in the US, they see me as Mexican. So, it’s hard to define if I’m Mexican or American.

The exclusion Alonso experienced from his Mexican and American family members influenced his perception of being between two nations and the confusion of identifying as “Mexican or American.” Similar to Alonso’s thoughts, Jazz described the difficult experience of being between cultures, “Because you feel like you’re not here or there you know. …You’re between cultures and that’s when it gets difficult.” Similarly, America explained how her lack of a thorough understanding about current issues in both nations influenced her thoughts of being in between two nations. America explained the uncomfortable feeling of “living between” the two nations as she illustrated how she was “lost about what is going on” in the United States and in Mexico. Overall, the participants described the feeling of being “in-between” cultures, societies and nations as a confusing, and uncomfortable experience.

**Adapting subjectively and behaviorally.** Students adjusted and adapted their thoughts and behavior, in different forms, to cope with factors that influenced the experiences of being in in-between cultures, societies and nations. While, students changed their way of thinking and acting to feel more comfortable in in their transborder lifestyle the process of adaptation also
influenced how they viewed their identity as transborder people. For example, Melisa described how she was able to belong to both cultures by speaking English in the United States and Spanish in Mexico. More specifically, she explained that through language she could be, at times, “American” or “Mexican,” and other times, she could be “both” at the same time.

Other students changed the way they thought about their home in order to feel comfortable about simultaneously living in both nations. Francisco shared his thoughts: “That’s where I call home. Where I feel more peaceful, I feel more relaxed, comfortable.... Sometimes it’s in Mexico with my parents, sometimes it’s here in San Diego because it’s close to school and I don’t have to worry about the border. So it’s kind of both. Depending on the situation.” Francisco changed the practical and general definition of home to a figurative meaning. Other students explained similar thoughts about living simultaneously in both nations. For example, Jazz described how she belonged to both nations and cultures by being in both places “as often” as she possibly could. Overall, in this category illustrated how students changed their thoughts and behavior to belong and feel comfortable in both nations through their transborder interactions.

**Mixture of both cultures.** In this fourth category, students identified how they mix cultural elements from their American culture and their Mexican culture. The participants of this study explained that they are able to mix both cultures because they live a transborder lifestyle. America explained her thoughts: “I think transborder people, college students or those who are crossing the border have a new kind of culture because we just mix two.” Daniel further illustrated this idea:

> Being raised in between the two countries you get a lot of influence from both at the same time whether it is from watching American TV in T.J. or listening to Mexican music in the U.S. those type of influences. It really gives you a different type of… pallet for a certain type of culture…where it can’t be too much of one or the other, it kind of has to be in the middle in a way. Like I don’t relate exactly to one and I don’t relate to the other one either. It has to be a mix of both.”

Daniel explained how being exposed to both cultures influenced how he and other transborder community members created their culture by mixing experiences from the American culture and the Mexican culture. Carla also explained how she lived her life by mixing elements from both cultures, “I think that having two different cultures you’re going to grab a little bit of what you want and then practice what you want. I think you just get what you want, and then just live by it.” Carla explained how she mixed both cultures by choosing and picking what she wanted to practice from both cultures. In particular, she described how she could practice and/or break traditional practices from one culture by acting how she preferred in the other culture. Overall, students described that by mixing both cultures, they had the choice to practice what they preferred from each culture.
Transborder culture defined. In this category, participants defined the values, beliefs and practices they shared with other transborder community members and students. More specifically, students defined their culture based on their transborder interactions. For example, Daniel defined the transborder culture as the following:

People who can relate to both cultures and none of them at the same time. Who could relate to certain subject from one nation and disregard another subject from the other nation. I took part in the latest manifestations called “Yo Soy 132”, I went to “T.J.” and I went over there even though I’m not a legal resident of Mexico I went to do my part … It’s hard to distinguish but I think most of the border culture is just Mexicans who relate more to the United States than they do to Mexico in a way.

Daniel described the transborder culture as members who can choose to belong to both nations regardless of national citizenship. Daniel explained that members of the transborder culture belong to each nation by being an active member in the American and Mexican cultures. Similarly, Alonso explained how the transborder culture is different from other cultures, like the Mexican-American culture, because of the experience of crossing the border, language, and maintaining contact within the Mexican nation. Similar to Alonso, in this category, students explained the struggle of identifying as other cultures and the importance of having a transborder cultural identification.

Transborder cultural practices and beliefs. In this last category, students described a clear understanding of how their transborder interactions influenced their thoughts and behaviors. Moreover, students embrace transborder cultural practices and beliefs that were based on their transborder lifestyle. A common thought students shared about living a transborder lifestyle was that they would experience the best from both the American culture and the Mexican culture. Carla further illustrated this idea, “It’s just like you get the best of both worlds. You get what you want, and then, just if you like something from a culture, from both cultures, just apply it to your life and then just, I don’t know, just mix it. Like a cafeteria, you have so many options, you just get what you want and just enjoy it.” All participants in this study shared a similar idea about being able to experience “the best of both worlds” as a result of their transborder lifestyle. For Daniel, the idea of experiencing the “best of both worlds” was a factor that further encouraged him to live a transborder lifestyle. Daniel explained how the reasons why he crossed the border changed with time:

Well before it used to be that I crossed frequently to see my ex-girlfriend so that was a motivation back then just to go and see her and come back…Right now it’s to see my friends and do whatever activities I like to do. But, I don’t think there’s been much influence from people if I want to go back to “T.J.” or not it’s mostly if I feel like it.
Daniel’s description illustrated how participants in this study changed from engaging in transborder experiences as result of external factors to engaging in transborder experiences as a result of an internal locus of control. Andrea further described how being in two nations and freely practicing elements from each culture has informed her identity. “I think that your identity is the experiences you have… I’ve been having experiences here in San Diego, and there in Tijuana, so I think they do influence my identity… So you grab or take what you want to practice.”

Other students perceived the border differently as a result of overcoming the contextual obstacles of their environment. As a result, they thought about the U.S.-Mexico border and the separate nations as one city. Alonso’s thoughts supported this idea: “I still see the difference between the two countries… But the short period of time that it takes me to go from San Diego to Tijuana, it’s almost as being in one city. That’s why I say the border has been erased, because it doesn’t take me that long to go from one place to the other.” Perceiving the border as one city further encouraged students to live a transborder lifestyle. Gamalion shared similar thoughts:

I think that for me, being here since high school, it’s like normal for me. I don’t care anymore. It’s just the routine that I make, cross the border, come here to school and go back home and so because of the motorcycle; it’s faster for me to get here from point A to point B so I don’t care anymore… The border is nonexistent, wiped out.

In this last category of transborder identity formation, the participants of this study described transborder cultural practices and ways of thinking that were a result of their experiences in both nations and transborder lifestyles. Their transborder cultural practices were ways of acting that were conditioned through their experiences in both nations and the transborder context.

A Conceptual Model of the Integration of Categories

In Figure 1, I present a conceptual illustration of the relationship among the findings of this study. The relationships across the findings are further illustrated through three major themes: (a) Obstacles Through the Transborder Context, (b) Transborder Identity Influential Factors, and (c) Transborder Identity Formation. **Obstacles Through the Transborder Context** refer to the barriers transborder college students experience as a result of their transborder interactions. The obstacles transborder college students experience from their environment hinder their ability to engage fluidly in a transborder lifestyle. **Transborder Identity Influential Factors**, illustrate how transborder college students adapted to the obstacles they experienced through the transborder context. Students adapted in various ways and to different degrees in order to cope with the obstacles they experienced. Lastly, **Transborder Identity Formation** illustrates how transborder college student changed the way they thought and acted as a result of their adaptation to the obstacles they experienced through their environment. Transborder college students subjectively and physically transformed the obstacles they encountered through
the transborder context into challenges they could overcome; and as a result, they developed new ways of thinking and acting. Furthermore, the process of adaptation influenced how they perceived their identities. A transborder identity is illustrated through six different categories. In each category, students described how they thought about their identity, the U.S.-Mexico border, and their transborder lifestyle.

**Limitations**

Like many studies, this study is not without limitations. First, it is noteworthy to highlight that the data for this study was collected in the fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters, before the 2017 Trump presidential administration. Currently, transborder students might be living a more hostile environment as a result of the current presidents’ perpetuation of micro-aggressions towards Mexicans and efforts to increase security of the U.S.-Mexico Border. As result, more current research on transborder students in needed to study the present realities that...
they are living under the Trump presidential administration.

Second, this is an exploratory-grounded theory study and I only interviewed 12 transborder college students. In my future research I plan to implement a grounded theory study with more participants to explore deeply how transborder students ascribe meanings to their transborder identity. I also plan to study the intersections of identity, such as, race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, in order to voice multiple identities in relation to a transborder culture. Moreover, triangulation was limited to one-on-one interviews and a questionnaire. Due to the sensitivity of talking about identity focus groups was not an option that I found appropriate to implement in this study. However, in my future research I plan to use grounded theory and photovoice methods to implement triangulation through transfronterizo student interviews and photographs to explore how participants illustrate their transborder identities.

**Implications for Educational Policy and Practice**

Transborder and transnational ties among immigrant families in the United are more prevalent now than ever before and this form of movement of populations and interactions among people between nations will continue to be significant experiences in the lives of immigrant families in years to come. Particularly, transfronterizo college students who form part of the transborder phenomenon in the San Diego-Tijuana border region have transcended the conventional idea of how populations interact in the societal systems of the nations and states. As a result, policy and practice in higher education systems in San Diego have not been created with the experiences of transfronterizo college students in mind. In order to change how higher education institutions serve transfronterizo college students, we need to implement long-term changes in the university’s residency policies to include the experiences of transfronterizo college students. In order to change the definition of residency and to eliminate international tuition fees for transfronterizo U.S.-citizen students, we can look at universities in other states that have implemented similar changes to their residency requirements. For example, "In higher education, the state of Texas offers in-state tuition [fees] to Mexican students from border cities who attend the local universities in the US. This has been operationalized by universities in Laredo, Brownsville, and El Paso” (Gerber, 2002).

Second, higher education institutions need to create spaces of empowerment where transfronterizo students can implement their transborder skills through leadership opportunities. The ability to navigate in multiple societal and cultural contexts through language and the understanding of social norms illustrates significant talent and great potential to be successful in a global context. Higher education systems should view these experiences as strengths and foster the developmental of students who share transnational and transborder ties. Overall, while student populations change and become more transborder, transnational and globalized citizens, institutional policies and practices also need to change in order to fit the needs of their students in today’s 21st century.
References


