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"Because I'm a Citizen:" The Experiences of Transfronterizo College Students in Higher Education Along the U.S.-Mexico Border.

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“BECAUSE I’M A CITIZEN:” THE EXPERIENCES OF TRANSFRONTERIZO COLLEGE
STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION ALONG THE U.S.-MÉXICO BORDER

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Master’s Program in Sociology

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Dedication

I dedicate my work to my beloved parents, Humberto and Catalina, who have been my source of inspiration, strength, and guidance. I would like to dedicate this project to my siblings; especially to Jacob for always motivating me, supporting my dream, inspiring me to excel, pushing me to finish my graduate degree, and encouraging me to continue this project when, at times, it became difficult. I dedicate this thesis to Dr. Aurelia Lorena Murga for taking part in this project, providing guidance, and supporting me throughout this process. Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to all the people who took part in this project, shared their educational experiences, and allowed me to be part of your lives as you continue your educational goals. I dedicate this thesis to the members of my thesis committee for being supportive, guiding me, and motivating through this thesis process.

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by

JUAN J. MENDOZA

THESIS

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Abstract

Transfronterizo college students are students who reside in México while attending college or university in the United States. This study will be expanding the transnational literature in two ways. First, this study addresses how citizenships status impacts transnational college students. In particular, the study explores how citizenship status affects the everyday lived experiences of transfronterizo college students along the U.S.-México border. The focus of my research is to investigate how citizenship status affects transfronterizo college students' decisions to enroll in college in the U.S. while living along the U.S.-México border. The current study draws on data collected from November 2016 to April 2018 collected in El Paso, Texas. Flyers were utilized to collect participants for the study that resulted in twenty-three participants. Findings suggest that while U.S. citizenship status offers transfronterizo college students the ability to cross the port of entry with no restrictions, allowing them to attend schools in the United States, but this status does not protect them from being viewed and treated as being culturally deficient due to their relationship to México. In conclusion the findings from this study suggest that citizenship status impacts transfronterizo college students in different areas of their lives with financial stressors, notions of "hiding," personal obstacles, marginalization, institutional barriers, and benefits impacting transfronterizo college students' academic goals in higher education in the United States.

Table of Contents

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	vi
Table of Contents	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Context of U.S.-México border: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo	2
Chapter 3: Literature Review	7
Transnational Students' Experiences	7
Citizenship	10
Predominately white regions and predominately non-white regions	15
Social Class	16
Chapter 4: Conceptual framework	20
Chapter 5: Methodology	21
Participants	22
Sampling	24
Interviews	24
Transcriptions	25
Data Analysis	26
Chapter 6: Results	28
The benefits of U.S. citizenship	28
Living with Financial Stressors	31
Citizenship and “hiding” the transfronterizo lifestyle	35
Personal obstacles, marginalization, and institutional barriers	38
The changing national status of transfronterizo students	48

Chapter 7: Summary and Discussion	52
Chapter 8: Limitations	56
Chapter 9: Future research	57
Chapter 10: Conclusion.....	58
References.....	59
Appendix A Terms and Definitions	65
APPENDIX B Interview Guide-Border Crossing Students.....	66
APPENDIX C Thematic Codes	67
Vita	72

Chapter 1: Introduction

Each year at the end of May, thousands of local area high school students will be taking part in an old tradition by attending their high school graduation ceremony. Among those graduates are international students. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO, 2018 p. 1) estimates that there are 4.8 million international students who will be graduating and striving for a degree in higher education across the world in 2018. This group of high school students has been increasing each year for the past decade. Most of the international students come from developing nations into western universities such as the United States (U.S.), Germany, Great Britain (U.K.), Canada, and Australia.

Typically, the literature on international students centers on their migration, immigration, and experiences in higher education. A question of interest is why do students migrate internationally rather than attending a local or national colleges or universities? The most common perception about transnational students focuses on students' expectations of western universities and the degrees earned at these schools. The idea is that these schools will provide international students with several opportunities and benefits upon graduation (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Upward social mobility, economic, and employment opportunities are some of the main factors and reasons foreign students become international students (Altbach, 2004; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Chávez Montaña, 2006). International students beliefs and assumptions are that by completing and earning a college degree from a western university that this will exponentially increase their productivity value, earn them better wages, and open better job opportunities (Altbach, 2004; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Chapter 2: Context of U.S.-México border: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

In this section, I provide some history of the U.S.-México border and the relationship between the two countries by addressing the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This history provides contextual information that helps frame the ways in which transnational students have been impacted by their relationship to the border. Below, I discuss the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as an event that influenced the lives of people on the borderlands/La Frontera.

The history of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo allows us to examine the relationship between the United States and México. After the war the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo relinquished five hundred twenty-five thousand square miles of territory from Mexico to the United States (Klein, 1996). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo would add the newly acquired Mexican territory that included all or parts of present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New México, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. The Rio Grande River was set as the new boundary separating the United States and México. Christine A. Klein (1996) explains that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo stipulates that in exchange for the transfer of land and sovereignty by México, the United States promised in the Treaty that it would "inviolably respect" the established private property rights of Mexican citizens in the conquered territory and provide them with "guarantees equally ample as if the same belonged to the citizens of the United States" (p. 202). The importance of this Treaty is how Mexican residents residing in these lands would transition from being Mexican citizens to American citizens and how all property rights would be honored under the Treaty agreements (Klein, 1996, p. 204). In other words, Mexican citizens who had lived all their lives in the northern region of México found themselves in a dire situation. The Northern Mexican land from one day to the next became property of the United States.

This is an important event in the history of both countries. The Mexican-American war, waged between the United States and México from 1846 to 1848 resulted in the expansion of territory for the United States. This growth happened with an ideology of “manifest destiny” that prompted a movement to expand U.S. territory across the entire North American continent (Klein, 1996). Manifest destiny was a widely held belief in the United States that its white settlers were destined to expand across North America and that this was both justified and inevitable.

After the war and as per the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, México relinquished five hundred twenty-five thousand square miles of territory to the United States (Klein, 1996). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo would add the newly acquired Mexican territory that included all or parts of present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New México, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. The Rio Grande River was set as the new boundary separating the United States and México. Christine A. Klein (1996) explains that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo stipulates that in exchange for the transfer of land and sovereignty by México, the United States promised in the Treaty that it would "inviolably respect" the established private property rights of Mexican citizens in the conquered territory and provide them with "guarantees equally ample as if the same belonged to the citizens of the United States" (p. 202). The importance of this Treaty is how Mexican residents residing in these lands would transition from being Mexican citizens to American citizens and how all property rights would be honored under the Treaty agreements (Klein, 1996, p. 204). In other words, Mexican citizens who had lived all their lives in the northern region of México found themselves in a dire situation. The Northern Mexican land from one day to the next became property of the United States.

These actions had unprecedented consequences not only on Mexican citizens residing in the northern lands but also on the new republic that did not know what to do with these new citizens. Research findings suggest that the Treaty explains and describes briefly the subject of Mexican private rights, article VIII promises to respect such rights even when the landowner is absent and article IX guaranteed that Mexican (Mexican citizens) present in the territory would be “maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their livery and property while awaiting American citizenship” (Klein, 1996, p. 208-210). This status of former Mexican citizens in the newly conquered territory of the United States under article IX meant that Mexicans in the ceded territory had the option of retaining their Mexican citizenship or becoming citizens of the United States. Mexican citizens, if they wished to maintain and retain their Mexican citizenship, had to leave their territories and moved south of the Rio Grande (Klein, 1996). Those who followed the latter course of action and stayed in the territory found themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation. This vulnerability was created because they were no longer citizens of México. That meant that México owed them no duty and oversight of protection. At the same time, the federal government of the United States extended no special guardianship, responsibility, duty, or security to help its new citizens adjust and adapt to the new life under an unfamiliar political regimen unknown to them (Klein, 1996). This vulnerability was reinforced and maintained by the inability and inaction of the United States government while people awaited their American citizenship. For example, as new citizens of the United States, Mexican Americans were supposed to be provided with the rights, benefits, and opportunities afforded to people as a result of “legal” citizenship. Additionally, the rights and property of former Mexican citizens were insecure and subject to discriminatory attacks in the new republic. Even today, after 171 years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexican Americans are affected by this

vulnerability in the United States (Klein 1996; Sáenz & Morales, 2015). Although the border between the United States and México is defined territorially by legal systems and political structures, the social interaction of individuals and the institutions of both countries are carried out in a geographical context that goes beyond the frontier (Márquez & Romo, 2008).

Additionally, the Treaty created a divide between neighbors, families, and people who at one point were citizens of México and now found themselves deciding whether they would be citizens of the United States. What once was one community was split in half; the area became the northern border for México and the southern border for the United States. Furthermore, the question of identity became an issue for new American citizens. The appropriation of the term, label, and identity of “American” also played an important role in the separation and divide between the citizens of this new borderland or frontera. Identifying as Americans or Mexicans created a clear divide between people. People that were once a part of a community were now strangers. This tore away at any kind of relationship and notions of who has rights, access, and ability to navigate the borderland (Quijada, 2018; Piñeiro, 1990).

In the case of transfronterizo college students along the U.S.-México border, the proximity of the two countries provides students with the geographical opportunity to access and navigate the borderlands for educational purposes. One of the factors that has played a role in this is the advantage that some students have when it comes to their status as U.S. citizens. In particular, transfronterizos, border crossers, and transborder students move across international borders—U.S.-México border. Because of this, they develop binational social networks and, as part of their daily activities, acquire human, social, and economic capital in both countries. This group of students is a unique and exceptional kind of student because they are not considered either migrant, immigrants, and they cross the U.S.-México border on a daily or weekly basis

while living in México. The living arrangements of transfronterizo college students are diverse depending on the socioeconomic status of the family, migration status of parents, and the return migration experience of their parents. Likewise, transfronterizos, border crossers, and transborder students manage to attend school in the United States (Orraca, Rocha, & Vargas, 2017). In another words, regardless of how transfronterizo college students identified, they have different living arrangements throughout their educational careers. For example, during their formative years most students stay with extended family in the U.S. while attending school or commute daily from México into the United States. These types of commuting and living arrangement tend to be the norm most transfronterizo college students follow during their college years. I use the concept of transfronterizo because of the special relationship between the U.S. and México—the history, linguistic, commerce, and economic relationship affecting people in the two nations. In the following section, I address the literatures covering transnational students' experiences and citizenship since both of these inform the experiences of the participants in my study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

TRANSNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

The literature on transnational students finds that there are many transnational school aged children and students in higher education experiencing two or more school systems (Hamann & Zúñiga 2011, p. 143). Most of the research on international students in higher education has been devoted to problematizing common stereotypes and addressing the barriers and limitations experienced by international students as they decide on their destination choices for college (Román & Hamann 2014, p. 238). The fields of education and social science have defined transnational students differently throughout time. In the case of transnational students along the U.S.-México border, the proximity of the two countries provides students with the geographical opportunity to access and navigate the borderlands as well as the U.S. and Mexican educational systems. One of the factors that has played a role in this is the advantage that some students have when it comes to their legal status. In particular, transfronterizos, border crossers, and transborder students move across international borders as they cross the U.S.-México border. Because of this, they develop binational social networks and, as part of their daily activities, acquire human, social, and economic capital in both countries. This group of students is a unique and exceptional kind of student because they are not considered either migrant, immigrants, and they cross the U.S.-México border on a daily or weekly basis while living in México. The living arrangements of transfronterizo college students are diverse depending on the socioeconomic status of the family, migration status of parents, and the return migration experience of their parents. Likewise, transfronterizos, border crossers, and transborder students manage to attend school in the United States in a variety of ways (Orraca, Rocha, & Vargas, 2017). In another words, regardless of how college students identified as, they have different living arrangement throughout their educational careers. For example, during their formative years, most students

stay with extended family in the U.S. while attending school in the U.S. or commute daily from México into the U.S. to attend school. These types of commuting and living arrangement tend to be the norm most transfronterizo college students follow during their college years.

Previous research focusing on international students stresses the many challenges, barriers, and limitations experienced by these students when seeking higher education overseas. Findings suggest that language, students' experiences, and financial difficulties are among the top reasons most transnational students encounter complications when trying to accomplish their academic goals (Andrade, 2006; Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Chávez Montaña, 2006; Campbell & Li, 2008; Convertino, 2018; Gu, 2009; Hellstén, 2002; Lee, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mok, 2012; Orraca, Rocha, & Vargas, 2017; Relaño Pastor, 2007; Rienties et al., 2012; Roberts, Chou, & Ching, 2010; Rocha Romero & Orraca Romano, 2018; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009; Sherry et al., 2010; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013). Prior research has focused on the agency of transnational students, their communication skills, motivation, mobility, adaptation, adjustment, and how these factors influence the transition from their native homelands to their new overseas destinations. In other words, the research findings examine transnational students' evaluation and perceptions of their studying experiences in European, Australian, and U.S. universities and how this affects their academic lives. Research findings illustrate the challenges, barriers, and hardships international students' encounter during their transition into their new campus life, especially when the campus culture is different from their own. Various factors offer an insight into how transnational students have incorporated into the host culture, campus life, and classroom participation (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Chávez Montaña, 2006; Convertino, 2018; Cortez Román & Hamann, 2014; Hellstén, 2002; Mok, 2012; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2011). The ability of each transnational student to act or behave according to their own actions and

decision making, or agency, is one of the most common student characteristics found to influence students' lives. Other personal characteristics that matter include maturity, cooperation, motivation, communication, independence, and resiliency (Campbell & Li, 2008; Cortez Roman & Hamann, 2004; Gu, 2009; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009).

These character traits play an important role in the lives of transnational students because they may provide advantages and disadvantages when broadening the life experiences of students in the university, classroom, and in their private lives. Tim Mazzarol and Geoffrey N. Soutar's (2002) survey research on international students from India, Taiwan, China, and Indonesia finds that students are shaped and influenced by different factors when it comes to deciding on a host country for their higher education. Their research findings suggest that factors such as an institution's reputation for quality, an institution's links or alliances with other institutions familiar to the student, an institution's reputation for having high quality staff, an institution's alumni base and word of mouth referral process, the number of students enrolled at the institution, and whether an institution is willing to recognize students' qualifications were among the top reasons international students would decide to attend one university over another. In relation to the factors influencing the attractiveness of a particular host institution the findings also suggest that family has a major effect, influence, and impact on the decision making of the international student (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002: 89). Other research findings suggest that transnational students' academic performances may be affected by ethnicity, age, culture, residence, marital status, social economic status, and nationality (Orraca, Rocha, & Vargas, 2017; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Relaño Pastor, 2007; Rienties et al., 2012; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010). The authors explore students' personal characteristics and how it affected their adaption, and adjustment. For the purposes of this study, I will be using the

term *transfronterizo* to address the lived experiences of students living in the borderland of El Paso and Juárez. My research will provide insight into the different areas of transnational students' lives as they seek success in higher education.

CITIZENSHIP

Legal citizenship is a common relationship between an individual and a single country (nation-state). In this sense, the government of each nation creates laws that define who is and who may become a citizen of their state along with the rights and responsibilities that citizenship entitles. Additionally, citizenship is the status of a person recognized under the customs or laws as being a legal member of a sovereign state or belonging to a nation. Citizenship bestows people rights, privileges, and duties. However, citizenship has changed throughout human history (<http://www.Britannica.com>).

One of the most famous views of citizenship is the work of Thomas Humphrey Marshall and Tom Bottomore (1950), who believed in an evolutionary expansion of citizenship rights. Marshall and Bottomore examine the evolution of citizenship rights and social class. They also explore the importance of the effects, rights, and privileges that citizenship status offers an individual at the beginning of the twentieth-century in the United Kingdom. Their research findings suggest that the development of citizenship can be traced through the evolution of three elements, namely civil, political, and social rights (Marshall and Bottomore 1950, p. 82). According to Marshall and Bottomore (1950) citizenship is defined as “A national legal status that provides a set of rights and duties to individuals, a sense of belonging and intimately related with social services and protection offered by the state” (p. 82). Marshall and Bottomore suggest that citizenship status has an impact in all the aspects of the lives of the citizenry. In other words, this offers an understanding of how citizenship status allows access, benefits, and opportunities in the British society, including free education, healthcare, and government subsidies. However,

current debates on citizenship have taken a different stance and argue against Marshall's work. Daiva Stasiulis and Abigail B. Bakan's (1997) research findings suggest a re-conceptualization of citizenship as a negotiable relationship, one that is subject to change, and acted upon collectively within social, political, and economic relations of conflict (p. 112). The authors examine the case of foreign domestic workers in Canada and how citizenship is negotiated on a national as well as a global level. Secondly, the authors assess how Caribbean and Filipino foreign domestic workers in Canada use effective, and creative strategies as they attempt to (re)negotiate citizenship rights at the national and international level depending on their immigrant, migrant, transmigrant, and legal statuses. The experiences of both foreign domestic workers have a drastic difference depending on the gatekeepers, preference among domestic placement agencies, and immigration status that determine levels of access and restrictions in Canada. In this study, citizenship status may function as an assurance of further privilege for transnational business people and mobility rights for some workers while restricting others. In the case of foreign domestic workers in Canada, their citizenship status has been shaped and influenced by various factors such as employment agencies, gatekeepers, and the economic needs of Canada. In other words, Stasiulis and Bakan suggest that citizenship has been changing and requires a new way and perspective of how citizenship status affects the lives of individuals, especially those individuals who are (im)migrants. Furthermore, the literature on citizenship demonstrates a shifting and transformation of how citizenship has changed from the times of Thomas H. Marshall. These changes prompt a revolution of how citizenship is examined while promoting that there needs to be a restructuring on the concept. Hence, the question begs how have individuals' lives been affected by these changes and shifts in their citizenship status?

Nina G. Schiller (2017) examines citizenship with a different lens that is contemporary and practical in today's ever-changing political climate (p. 48). Schiller (2017) discusses the implications of migrant transnational social connections and networking in relation to citizenship status that affects transborder commuters' opportunities and employability in the borderlands (p. 56). She argues and proposes that the concept of transborder citizenship builds on the ideas of social and cultural citizenship and expands the examination of citizenship practices and claims to be transnational. Her research (2017) suggests that transborder citizens are people who live their lives across the borders of two or more nation-states, participate in the daily life of two or more states, and also have citizenship in these states whether on the basis of legal rights or being substantive members of those states (p. 75). In essence, individuals who identified as border-crossers, *fronterizo*, transnational, *transfronterizo*, and commuters have the ability and access to use the resources of two nations, two cultures, and two job markets as a result of their citizenship status. *Fronterizo* residents just like any other citizens in the American society may claim certain rights and privileges from their government and have the ability to traverse more than one government due to their privileged status and legal status. This type of citizenship is created and developed by the different types of contexts and characteristics that *fronterizo* commuters encounter within these two societies and their interactions on a daily basis. This means that their privilege and citizenship status is influenced by their interactions with binational, national, and transnational social spaces within the borderland. With regards to *fronterizo* and international students who identified as U.S. citizens, they possess U.S. citizenship as a mechanism of privilege. In brief because of their dual citizenship, they have access to the resources, educational opportunities, and benefits each individual nation offers its citizens in general. Transnational

students benefit from the chances available because they have the ability to traverse two nations, two cultures, and two languages providing the best conditions to succeed in life.

Transfronterizo college students utilize their nationality status(es) as an apparatus and/or a tool that they may use as needed for a particular activity or purpose. They may use this tool in order to have access to resources such as healthcare and education. This way of viewing, examining, and exploring citizenship as a fluid and continuous element that is part of an individuals' identity based on their environmental context offers a basis for understanding the lives of transnational students along the U.S.–México border. Transnational students' mobility is a type of migration in which the student has the ability to navigate and negotiate multiple social spaces in search for their educational attainment. Migration patterns, globalization, and transnational markets have also influenced the migration of workers around the globe and these factors have also influenced transnational student's decision-making choices. Thus, as job markets change as a result of the influences of globalization, capitalism, and private companies becoming transnational forces students will, to conform in the future, be able to follow these trends. Earning a degree from a U.S. university is thought to provide them a competitive edge in the U.S. workforce and in the transnational job market. Moreover, as Patricia Sanchez's (2001) work suggests transborder commuters create, nourish, and develop binational characteristics that provide the necessary privilege, access, and tools to navigate multiple spaces that the borderlands offer. Transborder commuters view their citizenship status as a privilege that affords most international students the opportunity and ability to live a transnational lifestyle. Sanchez describes how her upbringing and growing up on the frontera was influenced and shaped by her binational and transnational identities. Even though (bi)national identities are being explored in social spaces along the U.S.-México border, transborder commuters benefit from various statuses

and opportunities given and granted by their legal statuses. Both Schiller and Sanchez note the different ways citizenship may be viewed and understood depending on the context of the individuals. This means that citizenship in the borderlands is a unique phenomenon because of the multiple social spaces that commuters encounter in their daily lives. In the case of *fronterizo* college students and commuters, they have the legal status, access and ability to navigate multiple social spaces with ease. With reference to transnational students, they view their U.S. citizenship status in a positive manner in terms of legal, political, and economic access to resources that will offer better education and employment opportunities for their future.

In this study, I examine the educational experiences of *transfronterizo* college students who commute between the U.S. and México and attend higher education in the United States. *Transfronterizo* college students are a small but growing portion of the transborder commuters' population in the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez area. As residents and citizens, they have the ability to claim rights and privileges from the governments on both sides of the U.S.-México border. Darcy Tessman and Jill Koyama (2017), for example, explore *transfronterizo* families' childbearing practices, residency practices in the border, commuting to the U.S., and the parental rights that safeguard a better life for future children (p. 1). These researchers write that *fronterizo* parents create and develop parenting practices, family planning strategies, and long-term educational choices on behalf of their future children in order to safeguard access to the United States. Also, this long-term family planning may be expressed as steps, milestones, and goals parents must meet at times prior to the birth of their child(ren) and throughout the life of their child(ren). Safeguarding the American nationality of children is an important step to securing benefits in regard to education and employment opportunities. Likewise, the learning of the English language is an additional step to make sure *transfronterizo* children will succeed in the

American education system and workforce. Furthermore, having an American education will provide transfronterizo children with better employment opportunities than their parents ever had. With respect to citizenship, this status may be used as a powerful tool, one which offers access, rights, opportunities and statuses of different degrees depending on the individual. Though citizenship status offers an individual opportunities and advantages to excel in different aspects of life, there are groups of people that are still marginalized by American society, institutional apparatuses, and government entities even though they have the privilege of citizenship (Tessman & Koyama 2017).

PREDOMINATELY WHITE REGIONS AND PREDOMINATELY NON-WHITE REGIONS

Jenny J. Lee (2010) explores international students' experiences at a U.S. university and how they recommend or not recommend the U.S. university to peers from their home country (p. 66). Lee finds that international students experience greater difficulties and have a more negative experience in the U.S. university. These students felt as though they were not always treated equally or as fairly as native students. This was the most important factor influencing international students' recommendation of the university to others (Lee, 2010, p 76). The author explains that international students from predominantly non-white regions (PNWR) provided less than positive responses compared to those students that identified as coming from predominantly white regions (PWR) in the areas of satisfaction, difficulty, and recommendations (Lee, 2010, p. 73). That is to say, international students from PNWR regions were more likely not to recommend the university to others because of their negative experiences at the university campus.

Mark Sherry, Peter Thomas, and Wing Hong Chui (2010) examine the experiences of international students at the University of Toledo. Their research finds that some of the challenges international students encounter may be attributed to issues of adaptation to new

culture, English language problems, financial problems, and difficulty adjusting to local community and campus life (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 33). The authors argue that international students of color will not offer a recommendation or endorsement of Toledo University (TU) as a future potential destination for other members of their home country because of their past negative experiences at the university. Yet, Anglo international students would provide a recommendation or a positive endorsement of the university. This means that international students of color had a greater disadvantage when adjusting to campus life compared to Anglo international students. Having significant difficulties adjusting to the university, the campus, and the culture disrupted international students' participation in social gatherings, resulting in negative experiences. Lastly, international students felt that they were unwelcomed, treated indifferently, and unfairly compared to native college students. For these international students, their experiences were influenced and affected not by their nationality, language proficiency, or cultural differences as most previous literature has speculated, but by the color of their skin (Sherry et al., 2010).

SOCIAL CLASS

Another factor that is important to international students is the ability to pay for tuition, avoid financial difficulties, and staying out of debt while striving for a degree. Most international, fronterizo, transfronterizo and transnational students strive for scholarships and grants to avoid having financial difficulties. Yet, most international and transnational students who do not qualify or meet the requirements for funding look for other ways to pay for tuition. One of the most important key factors for international students when choosing an overseas school is the availability of scholarships and grants. Tim Mazzarol and Geoffrey N. Soutar (2002) suggest that international students decision-making in studying overseas is affected by several factors: an institutions reputation for quality education, link or alliances familiar to the

student, high-quality staff, recommendations by previous students, number of students enrolled and the willingness to recognize students' prior qualifications. First, international students compare and contrast between universities that have a respectable reputation, the university's reputation is derived from the prestigious academic standing and the quality of education it provides students. In other words, transnational students are looking at the qualifications of the university and if the prestige offered by the university's degree will be recognized by future employers. Next, transnational students selection of an overseas destination is based on the institution's links and the alliances with other institutions that are familiar to the student. Transnational students looking over the positive feedback, knowledge of the university, and campus conditions by previous students have a major impact on the decision-making process of transnational students choosing one overseas destination over another (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 88).

Having a connection, relationship, and positive experience between the transnational student population and the university offers a constant flow of students to that destination. For example, the Bhutanese Kingdom and the University of Texas at El Paso have a unique type of relationship in which a connection between the Bhutanese students and the university develop from alliances that were created years prior. Today, this relationship between the Bhutanese Kingdom and UTEP continues to foster the strong relationship between the two entities. Another factor important when selecting a university is the composition of the faculty and staff. Transnational students would like to be part of a university that has the capacity to excel (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002, p. 88). Lastly, the enrollment of students of a university and willingness to recognize students' prior qualifications are other factors that affect the decision-making process of transnational students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 88). These factors seem

more of a personal preference because some students like to attend a large university while other students would like to attend a smaller university. This choice is more about personal preferences, however, the number of students enrolled in the university and the university's ability to accept prior achievements were critical.

Gerardo M. Chávez Montaña (2006) explores the importance of transfronterizo students recognizing their nationality as an element that influences their decision-making process and how they choose one locale over another as an ideal destination for their college education (p. 8). His research findings explain that those students who are not American citizens or residents found it difficult when searching for, qualifying for, and acquiring academic grants and financial aid. Furthermore, their status as an "international student" did not allow them to qualify for certain programs. The transnational life is not an easy path or lifestyle for many transnational students. Chávez Montaña (2016) finds that the lifestyle of transfronterizos is a consequence of geographical opportunity provided and developed by the borderlands, community, and parents (p. 1). The ability to legally and socially cross the border for work, education, and recreation purposes has been a motivation for many border residents to increase their educational and economic prosperity. Additionally, other factors such as culture, nationality, gender perceptions, and class status also influence and shape transnational students' lifestyle and academic outcomes. In the context of the borderlands, the transnational lifestyle is not a new phenomenon but a decades-old tradition for American born citizens living across the border in México.

The U.S.-México border region is a unique space in which various elements that interact with each other becomes part of the daily routines and commutes for many transfronterizos. Many transborder crossers commute between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez for work, visit family, go shopping, enjoy the nightlife, and attend school. Just like transborder commuters,

transnational students interact with this unique space, however for many of them the commute is a lifetime journey. Many of the transnational students have been crossing back and forth between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez to strive for their education, employment opportunities, and living arrangements. In this sense, transnational students have the access and ability to navigate the border with ease.

Their privilege and citizenship status allow transnational students to have an advantage in the job market, access to educational benefits, and the ability to achieve a brighter future not only in the U.S. but also in México, if they wish to. For many transnational students, the concept of citizenship is viewed as an apparatus for certain rights, benefits, and opportunities connected to voting rights, healthcare, job opportunities, and education. Ana María Relaño Pastor (2007) explores how transfronterizos' legal status as U.S. citizens, either by birth or naturalization, offers them the territorial flexibility to reside on both sides of the border (p. 264). The flexibility of this legal status permits transnational students the ability to navigate two worlds that are different in many ways. In the case of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, on one side of the border we have Ciudad Juárez, México which has been plagued with the countless murders of women, university student killings, political corruption, police bribery, and narco-violence. On the other hand, we have El Paso, Texas, which is considered one of the top ten safest cities in the United States for the past eight years (City of El Paso Texas, 2017; Frías, 2016). Nonetheless, even when these two cities are in complete contrast. They are considered sister cities because they and their people depend on each other economically, share a similar commitment to promote tourism, share commerce and local industry, and share a cultural experience, to name a few.

Chapter 4: Conceptual framework

The literature on citizenship focuses on the legal, social, and cultural aspects of the concept. The legal function of citizenship stresses the relationship between individuals and the nation-state. This relationship focuses on how laws and policies determine who is and who may become a citizen of a nation (Tikkanen and Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018). The social aspect of citizenship focuses on the ways in which people experience a status of second-class citizenship through exclusion and/or a lack of “belonging” because they are not considered “ideal citizens” (Beaman, 2016; Flores-González, 2017). There is also a focus on cultural citizenship that addresses how citizenship is a “process and social status that is inherently cultural, in that ideas regarding worthy members of a citizenry are based on cultural assumptions” (Beaman, 2016, p. 852).

This third conceptual way at examining citizenship is the one I will be utilizing in order to analyze the experiences of transfronterizo college students in my study. This conceptual framework allows for the examination of the findings from my study of transfronterizo students because legal status is not the only significant factor impacting students’ lives when it comes to citizenship. As Beaman (2016) notes, culture is related to the ways in which people experience values, norms, and beliefs in relation to a “normative center” (p. 853). Consequently, the transfronterizo experience is also a cultural experience that is compared to the dominant white society in the United States. Though transfronterizo students in my study have “legal” U.S. citizenship status their experiences differ from other college students with U.S. citizenship because they are considered to have cultural deficits as a result of their relationship to México.

Chapter 5: Methodology

This qualitative study is part of a larger project that examines the lives, lived experiences, mobility, and hardships of transnational students along the U.S. México border. The larger project with collaborators Dr. Maria Cristina Morales and Eric Beltran, sociology graduate student, works to better understand the struggles and accomplishments of transfronterizo college students in the borderlands as they strive for academic attainment at the university level. More specifically, my current thesis project focuses on the educational aspirations and choices made by transfronterizo college students living in México and attending the United States for a degree in higher education. I explore how citizenship status impacts financial stressors, notions of “hiding,” personal obstacles, marginalization, institutional barriers and benefits affect transfronterizo college students’ academic goals in higher education in the United States.

The current study draws on data collected from November 2016 to April 2018. Data was collected on the campus of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). UTEP has an undergraduate student population breakdown of 17,088 (83.3%) Latinos students, 1,292 (6.3%) Anglo non-Latino students, 1,102 (5.4%) Mexican national students, 513 (2.5%) black or African American students, and 290 (1.4%) ethnicity unknown. Mexican national college students attending and enrolled at UTEP are labeled as non-resident alien students per university enrollment statistics. The study participants are residents of eight surrounding communities, three states, and two nations. El Paso, Texas, U.S.A, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México is a metropolitan area and the second largest land port of entry along the U.S.-México border. El Paso, Texas, U.S.A is a binational metropolitan area with a population of 840,410 inhabitants (Census, 2015). While Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México the second largest binational metropolitan in the Mexican territory has a population of 1,332,131 inhabitants (INEGI.org.Mx, 2014). In the case of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, on one side of the border we have Ciudad

Juárez, México that has been plagued with the countless murders of women, university student killings, political corruption, police bribery, and narco-violence. On the other hand, we have El Paso, Texas, which is considered one of the top ten safest cities in the United States for the past eight years (City of El Paso Texas, 2017; Frías, 2016). Nonetheless, even when these two cities are in complete contrast. El Paso and Juárez are considered sister cities since their people are dependent on each other when it comes to negotiating and navigating their daily business, work, and recreation.

The current study will explore the lives, commute, and transfronterizo life of college students. My thesis also seeks to analyze how citizenship status impacts the financial stressors, notions of “hiding,” personal obstacles, marginalization, institutional barriers and benefits affect transfronterizo college students’ academic goals in higher education in the United States. Each morning hundreds of students cross the U.S. international port of entry from México. Transfronterizo college students are a unique population because of their citizenship status, rights, benefits, opportunities, and privilege to navigate both U.S. and Mexican societies.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of twenty-three (23) transfronterizo college students participated in the study. Twenty-one (21) of the participants were current students and two had recently graduated. Respondents’ demographics included the following age, gender, sex, education level, language, residence, nationality, the location of primary education, and the location of high school education, and type of school. When asked for the gender that they identified with one participant identified as gay, one participant identified as bisexual, thirteen (13) identified as a female/woman, and eight (8) identified as a male/man. When asked for the citizenship seventeen (17) identified as U.S. native-born, three (3) as naturalized U.S. citizens, and three (3) as Mexican nationals. Dual citizenship status was not asked about by interviewers and did not come

up as a topic of discussion during our interviews. Fifteen (15) attended public school education and eight (8) attended private high schools. Students who attended public schools in the U.S. had a mix of public and private education in México. Students who attended private schools in the U.S. attended primary charter and private schools in México. All participants are fluent bilingual speakers in English and Spanish. Participants ranged from 18 years old to 30 years old with an average age of 22.5 years for the population. One study participant did not want to disclose age. Additionally, transnational students were familiar with both the Mexican and U.S. educational systems. The majority of transnational students lived in El Paso, Texas at the time of the interview stage but crossed the U.S.-México border as a part of their day-to-day life. The majority of the study participants had been crossing the border at different intervals, some crossed every day, on occasional weekends, every other day, and three times a week.

Students' educational backgrounds varied. For instance, some students attended elementary school in the U.S. for most of their lives, attending both Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) and kindergarten in México, while other students attended school in México most of their lives and transferred to a U.S. school right before the start of high school. Other transnational students had a combination of attending and switching between school years in the American school then transferring to Mexican schools and vice versa. There were two students that completed all their formative years in the Mexican educational system then continued their higher education at UTEP. A breakdown of respondents' school experience and other demographic information is provided in Table 1.

When asked about their formative school years (K-12) twelve (12) participants stated that they had a mixture of attending both the American and Mexican school systems back and forth throughout their lives. Eight (8) participants attended all their formative school years (K-12)

solely in the Mexican school system. These students stated that they only attended the American school system as part of their undergraduate and graduate enrollments. Three (3) participants attended all their formative school years (K-12) solely in the American school system. When participants were asked about their status in the university nineteen (19) identified as undergraduate students and four (4) identified as graduate students.

SAMPLING

Flyers were utilized to recruit participants. They were placed throughout the university campus in order to reach a diverse portion of the study body. Most of the study participants were recruited through the assistance of the flyers posted throughout campus and three participants were recruited via the snowball sampling method. Participants were asked to meet the following criteria: must be attending or attended the university between the time periods of 2005 to the present; participants must be currently living, previously lived, crossed the international port of entry and/or lived during any time period in México while attending the American university. Potential study participants were omitted from local early college high schools because of the age requirements. This study used snowball sampling from transnational students attending, enrolled, and alumni students at UTEP, which garnered three participants (Singleton Jr. & Straits, 2018).

INTERVIEWS

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted by one of the three researchers of this project. Questions focused on education, gender, and border crossings. Interviews were semi structured to allow participants the ability to speak freely during the interview session while maintaining a structured focus for the study. The use of this technique allows for the production of rich data and permits the researcher observational data to gather that otherwise would not be captured with only the structured questionnaire (Singleton Jr. & Straits, 2018, p. 273). The

location of the interview was opened to participants' discretion. This allowed participants to feel comfortable and willing to speak freely when it came to having discussions dealing with sensitive topics. Conference rooms and workstation rooms at the University were utilized for the interviews. The interview questions, rewording of the questions and definition of concepts not known by participants were given in English by the researcher to the participants. However, participants were advised to speak freely, openly and in private in the language they felt most comfortable. A welcoming and safe space was created for participants to speak freely in English and/or Spanish to capture their experiences, traumas, happy, sad, and challenging times. English is not the primary language of several participants. I conducted all interviews that were in Spanish. Interviews lasted anywhere from forty-five minutes to a maximum of five hours. One interview was administered via Skype per participant's request because of their busy schedule.

Accounting for this vulnerable population status, some participants displayed concerns about the study due to the current political climate in the nation and, at the time, the possible election of presidential candidate Donald Trump. At times participants appeared to hesitate in their responses, mainly when dealing with questions about residency, citizenship, and family status. As a result, it is important to recognize that our study may have shown a more optimistic picture of transnational college students' experiences in the borderlands if the political climate of the nation would have been different. Five early committed study candidates withdrew from the study once presidential candidate Donald Trump was elected to be the 45th president of the United States.

TRANSCRIPTIONS

All interviews were transcribed to English. Five (5) participants spoke Spanish during the interview to facilitate their thoughts and experiences. I translated all interviews from Spanish to English during the transcription phase to ensure no data was lost including meanings,

expressions, and emotions, which the participants had experienced throughout their lives.

Pseudonyms were used in order to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality.

DATA ANALYSIS

Participants agreed to be audio recorded during their interviews in order for interviewers to document and re-tell their stories. Participants were ensured that recordings would only be listened, viewed and handled by the primary researcher, co-author, and committee chair. Twenty-two (22) interviews were recorded using multiple devices such as tape recorders, voice memos applications (apps), and cell phone voice apps. These methods were employed to ensure the collection of data is handled properly while avoiding any type of corruption that would compromise the study and/or the data. One participant declined to be audio recorded during the interview phase, thus written notes were taken to capture the experiences being recounted by the participant. Interviews were transcribed utilizing the program Nvivo, which is qualitative data analysis computer software. With the use of this program, data were examined and coded for patterns and themes. Some of the themes that developed out of the data included citizenship, language, identity, socio-economic status, parent's decisions, family influence, resiliency, maturity, siblings, and time management, to list a few. Citizenship is one of the major themes that would be used by participants as a rite of passage. The participants in this study viewed this concept as an advantage, benefit, and right. Additionally, nationality played an important role in the daily life of the participants because most agreed that it provided certain advantages and disadvantages. Socio-economic status (SES) became an instrumental tool, which affected all participants in various ways. For example, for some students, socioeconomic status provided a good quality of life compared to other participants. SES offers advantages, opportunities, and opens doors that otherwise would be difficult to have access to. Additionally, SES provided

commodities to certain spaces rather than limitations and barriers that other participants encounter during their journey to strive for their educational attainment goals.

Chapter 6: Results

THE BENEFITS OF U.S. CITIZENSHIP

The U.S. laws and the Constitution grant certain rights to both citizens and non-citizens living in the United States such as protection of the law, individual rights, and security. However, certain rights are only available for citizens such as voting rights, federal employment opportunities, security from deportation, and the ability to run for elected office (Brubaker, 1989, p. 157-162). One of the most common notions or ideas held by the majority of the transfronterizo college students that were U.S. citizens in this study was that their citizenship status offered them certain benefits, rights, and opportunities. The transfronterizo college students that were U.S. citizens assumed that some of these privileges and rights are the ability to access their education and to participate in the U.S. job market. For instance, they knew they had the opportunity to attend either a private or public school in the U.S. or that they had the choice to be employed in the U.S. or Mexican job market. Parents, grandparents, and other family members of transfronterizo students reinforced this knowledge since childhood.

The majority of the transfronterizo college students in this study saw citizenship as an entitlement of privilege and benefits for those born in the United States. Parents often transferred these ideas to their children and, because of this, transfronterizo college students would maintain this portrayal of citizenship throughout their lives. Brenda was born in Ciudad Juárez, attended part of her elementary school years in México, and eventually became a naturalized U.S. citizen. In 2011, she started middle school in Texas for the first time. She recalls that the transition was difficult, and she wishes to forget that part of her life because of the hardships and difficulties she experienced. Brenda shared:

The benefits are things that perhaps I would not have the opportunity to obtain, the many opportunities that I experience if I had not moved and attended school in El Paso. Then, I suppose there are a lot of benefits due to that such as having a better

education, having different goals that perhaps I might not have if I lived in Ciudad Juárez.

Brenda believed she would not have had the same benefits and goals if she were not a U.S. citizen. She explained that she might have dropped out of school and started to work if she stayed in México. She assumed that staying in México might not have provided her with the same opportunities and benefits as those she experienced in the United States.

The most common view among transnational students was the notion that their citizenship was interpreted as a benefit they were entitled to have because they were born in the United States. The majority of the students in this study voiced concerns that if they did not have American citizenship their ability to study, work, and have their current lifestyle would not be possible. For example, Diana did not think about why she had to attend a U.S. school while she lived in Juárez. Crossing the international bridge was a lot of trouble when she was young, but now as a young adult Diana understood that her U.S. citizenship status played a role in her attending school in the United States. Most of the transfronterizo college students in this study had a similar awareness that their U.S. citizenship status provided them access, rights, and opportunities that other residents in Ciudad Juárez did not have. Brenda revealed that her life would be completely different if she was not a U.S. citizen and emphasized that if she lived in Ciudad Juárez she might have dropped out of school early in her life and gotten a job. Similar to Brenda, the majority of transfronterizo college students believe that without their citizenship status they would be living a completely different life and would not have the same benefits or opportunities so readily available to them. For Brenda crossing the border and attending school is a major commitment that requires her undivided attention. She describes that her struggles and hardships make her be more appreciative of the ability to attend school. Gerardo Mauricio Chávez Montaña (2006) suggests that a weak economy and educational infrastructure in the

sending community becomes a pull factor and motivation for transfronterizos, border crossers, and transnational students to migrate to the United States (p. 10). In a similar example, the weak economy and educational system of Ciudad Juárez motivates students to strive for their education in the U.S. In this study it was obvious that transfronterizo college students' U.S. citizenship offered them the ability and motivation to take part in higher education in the United States. Beatriz, for example, is thankful for the ability to cross the international border every time she does it. Beatriz mentioned:

Well for me the benefits are that I appreciate it more every time I cross the bridge. I get to school on time, and I am yeah, I am here. I am going to pay attention to this lesson because I struggle to get here. I am going to do all my work because coming here is not for nothing, I'm just not here for fun I come here to study and I have to invest my time in what I am doing. Because I can't stay at home cause I have to come here and get an education.

For transfronterizo college students who are U.S. citizens' coming to the United States offers them benefits that may not be available in México. All of the transfronterizo college students agreed that their lives would be completely different if they did not have the ability to cross the border or have the same access to an American education and culture. For some transfronterizo with U.S. citizenship, this status also provided independence and freedom from family that never would have happened if they stayed and completed a college education in México. Sherry et al. (2010) find that financial difficulties may inhibit academic attainment among international students and this was something I found as issue for the transfronterizo students in my study. Though, I should point out that being able to commute back and forth from El Paso to Juarez is also something that only those who can afford it are able to do. That is, economic factors further complicate the discussion when it comes to the dynamic lives of transfronterizo college students.

One of the issues to keep in mind when it comes to minimizing the financial constraints of transfronterizo college students is that universities have different ways of facilitating the scholarships, grants, and loans for them. In the case of transfronterizo college students at UTEP,

the university has created a program called “El Programa de Asistencia Estudiantil (PASE)”. This program provides financial assistance for Mexican students. It grants participants a tuition discount, so they can pay the same tuition as Texas residents. Once the student is approved in the PASE program, they must recertify each year to continue receiving the benefits (www.utep.edu/student-affairs/PASE). As a state university UTEP must have a different tuition for Texas residents (resident tuition) and non-state (non-resident tuition), including international students. Mexican students, who are a part of PASE, pay resident tuition. Transfronterizo college students who self-identify as Mexican nationals have the opportunity to participate in the PASE program and this facilitates college attendance because they are able to pay in-state tuition, like Texas residents. Normally, international and transfronterizo college students would have to pay out-of-state tuition, which tends to be higher than in-state tuition (www.utep.edu/student-affairs/financialaid/overview/cost-of-attendance). Currently, UTEP’s in-state tuition is seven thousand fifty dollars for undergraduate Texas residents and nineteen thousand five hundred twenty-four dollars for out-of-state non-resident students. Graduate students currently pay six thousand one hundred seventy for in-state tuition (\$6,170) and fourteen thousand eight hundred seventy eight (\$14,878) for out-of-state tuition.

LIVING WITH FINANCIAL STRESSORS

What is a transfronterizo lifestyle and how does someone become a transfronterizo student? Sometimes, the transfronterizo experience is a voluntary personal decision made by the individual. At other times, it may be an involuntary or a forced decision that is made by a family member of the transfronterizo student. Although all of transfronterizo students value an American education, a major reasons why transfronterizo college students and their families decide to live in México are because of economic stressors and/or issues related to citizenship status. Some of the reasons why transfronterizo families decide to live in México are because of the affordability or the low cost of living, deported or return (im)migration transfronterizo family

members, and families who voluntarily decide to return to México (Orraca, Rocha, & Vargas, 2017, p. 391).

In my study, I found that transfronterizo college students' decisions to reside in Mexico were attributed to the low cost of living on the Mexican versus the U.S. side of the border. Despite economic circumstances that forced transfronterizo students to live in Mexico, students would continue the movement between countries after their formative school years because of their goals of earning a college degree or employment opportunities in the United States. In the following quote, Juan shared that he currently works for a delivery company in El Paso, but he chooses to live in Juárez because of the affordability. He said, "Oh, I get paid better here (El Paso), it is converted to triple the money in Juárez. I live very well; I work a normal job over here (El Paso). I work I just organize the boxes [for delivery] that is all, which gives me enough money for gas, food, friends, girlfriend, and miscellaneous stuff I want to buy."

For transfronterizo college students traveling back and forth is a part of a routine that they got used to since they were children. Commuting back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico was a part of their everyday lives from a young age. For example, Marisol noted how, "I would wake up three hours before school, I would prepare for the week then I would cross into El Paso, which was the routine. It is the same routine that I had when I was a child in elementary school."

Students' U.S. citizenship status and their residency on the Mexico-U.S. border provides them access to American educational institutions. Marisol was born and lived most of her life in El Paso but maintains a close relationship with Ciudad Juárez, which is where most of her extended family lives. In 2005, her family encountered an economic crisis that forced them to relocate to Ciudad Juárez from El Paso. This was a difficult time for Marisol because her parents

moved to México with family that lived there while she lived with her aunt's family in El Paso. Her living arrangement consisted of living in El Paso during the week and spending her weekends in México with her parents. She graduated from high school and enrolled at UTEP. Marisol then moved into her own apartment during her college years. She stated that her father helps with her living expenses while she attends college because he did not want her to be crossing the border, especially at night. Marisol said:

My family moved to Ciudad Juárez because of economic hardships and it was just too difficult. I have been attending American schools since 2005 crossing two or three times a week now. My dad wants me to pursue my education and says that he will help me as much as possible and I understand that my parents are sacrificing a lot for my education. Which is why I really want to finish as soon as possible.

Marisol spoke about how "it" was just "too difficult" though I did not probe for what she meant by "it" she later spoke about how paying bills, rent, and other expenses became economic stressors for her father. Though he had agreed to help with college tuition, the rental apartment, and additional expenses, she wanted to finish college as soon as possible in order to relieve the economic pressure felt by her father. Marisol understands that the sacrifice her parents are making is a great one because they are helping pay for her tuition while they are earning pesos (Mexican currency) and this adds to the financial burden placed on the family. This situation worries, stresses, and pushes Marisol to complete her degree faster. Situations such as the one that Marisol and her family are in may raise concerns about the financial strains that transfronterizo college students find themselves in and how this affects students' well-being.

Lucia found herself in a similar situation to that of Marisol's. Lucia was born in El Paso, Texas and lived a few years in the U.S. before moving to México. She explained that her parents were having monetary difficulties and struggles and that is why her family was forced to sell their home in El Paso and move to Juárez. She noted that her family lived in a rental property

for several years. Lucia completed all her basic elementary school in Ciudad Juárez and before beginning middle school she transferred to school in El Paso. Fortunately, Lucia's family persevered and once again achieved economic stability. For Lucia it was difficult to understand why years later after recovering from hardships her family had not returned to the United States. Though she is a U.S. citizen she continues to move back and forth between El Paso and Juárez. This movement has placed a stress on her educational career at UTEP. Her journey throughout the years as a transfronterizo college student has taken a toll on her. For instance, this can be felt in the following interaction:

Juan: If UTEP would create a branch in Ciudad Juárez would you attend? Why or Why not?

Lucia: Ohh, that would be very convenient for some students, I would go there if I could. If I had to come here [El Paso] then I would but if there was a change that I would do all my classes over there [Juárez] I would totally do them. Cause even though I am kind of used to the crossing, I do get tired, I didn't get tired when I was younger, I am that old, I am twenty-four but I feel a change from when I was fifteen to now. When I was fifteen I had a lot of energy, I didn't feel it was necessary to sleep or anything when I got home, now I feel like I want to have a nap. I thought that would be when I get to my thirties, but I am feeling it right now. Yes, I will have my degree, I will be able to work here [El Paso] and because work over there [Juarez] is not paid well. I am satisfied with myself, that I was able to overcome obstacles to get my degree. So yeah it was worth it, it was totally worth it and I know that this [education] be for me, but also I am happy to make my parents happy for all their sacrifices too.

If provided the opportunity to attend UTEP or a branch of UTEP in Juárez, Lucia and others viewed the Juárez location as a convenient one. They assumed that if a branch of the University was located in Juárez than tuition may be less expensive than that of UTEP, that commutes would lessen, and that they would earn an American college degree. Still, other transfronterizo students felt that having the UTEP branch in México would take prestige away from the University.

Financial difficulties is one of the main factors that hinder academic attainment for transfronterizo college students, but financial instability affects the entire family. The vignettes from Marisol and Lucia's conversations show that although they may be U.S. citizens their family economic status negatively impact on their college experience.

CITIZENSHIP AND "HIDING" THE TRANSFRONTERIZO LIFESTYLE

In her work Patricia Sanchez (2001) notes the transnational journey and commuter lifestyle she experienced as a young student with a privileged U.S. citizenship status, which affected her childhood years and school life. Similar to Sanchez (2001), the majority of the transfronterizo college students in this study experienced a lifestyle that specifically captured the uniqueness of the borderlands. The majority of the transfronterizo college students in this study acknowledged and understood that their U.S. citizenship status bestows on them access to resources, cultures, and employment opportunities in the U.S.. Still, Patricia Sanchez (2001) explains that the concept of "hiding," which was used by her growing up as a transfronterizo child, was a way or method for her to camouflage her transnational lifestyle. As a child, she deliberately wanted to separate her life in México, her summer vacations in México, and her school life in the U.S. (Sanchez, 2001, p. 378). I found that the transfronterizo college students in my study used this type of method of concealment. One of the main reasons to use this "hiding" concept or method is to avoid unwanted attention from peers, deter and cope with prejudices and discrimination in the classrooms, and in order to avoid being thought of as foreigners in school (Sanchez, 2001). The following story of Ximena highlights the ways in which transfronterizo college students have experienced prejudices, biases, and discrimination and how they have used "hiding" in order to strategize against these inequalities. For instance, Ximena shared:

I always try not to make it a point, I really and still don't like telling people that I live in Ciudad Juárez because of as soon as you tell them that their attitude and the way they speak to you changes a little bit. There was this one time, I don't know why it comes up I

was like I don't live here, I live in Ciudad Juárez, they were like, “oh your people,” so it's like what are you talking about or my citizenship came into question a lot at times. They would ask, “do you know where I can do this...” I was like nope, why would I know they would be like, “aren't you a Mexican citizen,” no oh I don't know. I feel like it can always change the way people talk to you... I feel like people have a lot of prejudices against people that live there (Ciudad Juárez).

Patricia Sanchez (2001) suggests that transfronterizo students use the concept of “hiding” as a defense mechanism for protection and survival in order to avoid problems and prejudices in the classroom (p. 377). In the same way, Ximena described using a method of concealment in order to separate her life in Ciudad Juárez and her life in El Paso. She was aware of the discrimination and prejudice people from Ciudad Juárez encountered in the United States. Ximena found that she wanted to avoid being seen as a foreigner (e.g. Mexican) in order to prevent uncomfortable moments at school that centered around stereotypes of Mexicans. She wanted to minimize difficult interactions between peers or classmates that occurred once people discovered her living arrangements and learned she was a transfronterizo college student. Ximena used the concept of “hiding” to make sure her living arrangements were not known by people outside her family and those she trusts. It was interesting to hear from Ximena how during her primary and secondary school years language proficiency was a factor that “gave her away” or exposed her transfronterizo life. Though she was a U.S. citizen she did not feel a part of educational and social space (e.g., peers). When she came to UTEP it was not her dominance of the English language that mattered but rather being perceived as a “Mexican,” that affected her. Though people may be of Mexican-descent and this is something that connects people from Juárez and El Paso together-there are socio-political/geo-political border divisions that have created division between the people on both sides. It was conversations and interactions in the college classroom that turned to the topic of immigration that made her want to “hide” her transfronterizo lifestyle. Ximena's experience shows us how even when she had U.S. citizenship

her relationship with México or being identified as “Mexican” by peers made her feel as an outsider. She learned from early encounters with peers and classroom discussions that if she disclosed her transfronterizo life that biases and prejudices emerged, so she hid these in later classes and encounters. While her U.S. citizenship status should have protected her, she found that her transfronterizo life became a way in which people viewed her as a foreigner or outsider.

Transfronterizo college students, like Ximena, avoid talking about their living arrangements to guard themselves against indifferences and changes in behavior and unfair treatments in the classroom. Transfronterizo college students are not ashamed or embarrassed of their living arrangements, their family in México, or their Mexican ancestry. During my interviews with participants, they would mention how they were not ashamed of living in Mexico, or of their Mexican ancestry. Still, it is important to address how people may internalize negative rhetoric and discourses about “Mexicans” as “illegals” since this has been a part of the ways in which racist, nativist, xenophobia works. Though people may not be embarrassed of being Mexican the ways in which *the other* is a structurally marginalized filter into the everyday lived experiences of people living on the border. For this reason, it is important to question the ways that students use “hiding” as a strategy to avoid being identified as an “immigrant.” The participants in this study that used the concept of “hiding” as a method of concealment or blending in where able to camouflage their identity/residential arrangements. They made use of this concept in order to fit in to their new context (e.g., schools in El Paso). Subsequently, transfronterizo college students like Ximena may hide significant parts of their lives to protect themselves within the school context; this includes peers, teachers, counselors, and any other officials that are a part of the school system. Students also use this “hiding” technique during their K-12 education in order to meet residency requirements in the United States. This is

something that is needed for elementary and secondary public school as well as for in-state tuition (Chávez Montaña, 2016; Lee, 2010; Sanchez, 2001).

Transfronterizo students often experience an isolation of their personal life and school life in order to avoid being stigmatized. “Hiding” may become a part of their daily lives, identity, and experiences. This is not to say that transfronterizo college students completely conceal their living arrangements, some of them do come forth and tell teachers, counselors, and peers about their transfronterizo experience. What is important to remember is that transfronterizo college students experience feelings of being scared and exposing themselves to being vulnerable and not knowing how people will react to their living arrangements. This remains especially concerning as people experience anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiment in the United States. Though transfronterizo students may have U.S. citizenship status, this does not secure them against the prejudices and biases Latinos encounter in their daily commute, workplace, and even in their personal life in the United States. Even to this day, years after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, transfronterizo students along the U.S.-México border are still being marginalized and encountering barriers, hardships, and limitations.

PERSONAL OBSTACLES, MARGINALIZATION, AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

International students often see U.S. college degrees as prestigious and promoting of better career opportunities. These students are often motivated by the expectations and promises that a U.S. degree offers when it comes to their future successes. Chavez Montano (2006) writes about how transfronterizo college students have to navigate personal obstacles, marginalization, and institutional barriers. The stories of students in this section offer insight into the ways in which they have been able to take advantage of educational opportunities because of their citizenship status while also encountering challenges in their lives.

Margarita was born in the U.S. and is working toward her bachelor's degree in engineering at UTEP. During our interview, she mentioned her experiences as a student in México as being unhappy. She attended Mexican schools from elementary to high school but eventually dropped out. Margarita recalls one of the things she did not like about the Mexican schools is that some of her teachers would discourage women students from certain fields of study. For example, in high school teachers would discourage women from striving for any degrees in the engineering field. They believed that women could not keep up with math focused careers. Margarita remembers that she used to argue with teachers a lot and eventually these arguments and clashes lead to her dropping out of high school. Later, she enrolled at the local vocational school for a short period of time. She recalls that the vocational school coursework or assignments were easy, but that most students would never complete the assignments and that teachers were lazy and corrupt. She recalls that one of her professors asked for money in return for a better grade and that the school curriculum had no structure. Eventually, she dropped out of the vocational school and started working, but her parents encouraged her to finish her education. She returned to high school once more in order to appease her parents but did not have the same willpower and motivation to continue her education. She ended up dropping out of school once again. I do not know about the experiences of other transfronterizo students that attended school in Mexico, in this case, Juarez, so I cannot generalize the educational encounters or experiences that they may have had while attending school there. Margarita, though, did experience a difficult time in that educational system.

Margarita had a difficult time when she was young with things not working at home, at school, and at work so she decided to move to Dallas, Texas, in 2014 in order to live with her uncle. Because of her early formative educational experiences, Margarita was inspired to

continue her education in Dallas and began attending local general education diploma (GED) evening classes. Margarita said, “In 2014, I decided to return to school, so I enrolled in the GED program in Dallas. This was an eye-opener because I was the only U.S. citizen in the class most of the other students were from foreign nations.” She earned her GED and enrolled at the University of Texas at Dallas (UT Dallas) then transferred to UTEP. Margarita moved back to El Paso in order to be close to her immediate family.

Margarita’s citizenship status allowed her the opportunity to relocate from México to the United States. During her time in Dallas, her life took a drastic shift when she enrolled and attended the local GED evening classes. Her living conditions improved, and her citizenship status offered her a second chance to revamp and continue her education in the United States.

Margarita commented:

My parents were the ones that forced me to come back to school and finish but I didn’t finish. So I moved to the U.S. with an uncle in Dallas. The opportunity of learning a new language and being able to attend a school with higher standards were factors to deciding to pursue a degree in the U.S.

Margarita’s experiences and interactions with the GED program in Dallas presented her an insightful life experience of what the reality of life can be like without an education. She shared that attending GED classes offered a glimpse of how hard and determined (im)migrants are when attempting to better themselves in the U.S.. She explained this to me during our interview because she said that her GED classes were mostly made up of (im)migrants, so she partly found inspiration through them when she was a part of those classes.

Maureen S. Andrade (2006) argues that having a lack of family, social, and institutional support groups inhibit the academic attainment of international students (p. 148). How do universities or colleges help new transfronterizo students adjust to a new educational system, culture, and language? For example, what happens to the transfronterizo college students such as

those taking part in this study who encounter difficulties and hardships navigating university departments and resources? What happens to transfronterizo college students when the institution they are attending lacks or has non-existing social support system for students? Some of the students in this study address the need for additional resources at the University in order to help those labeled as “international” students assimilate better to the institution. In the case of Margarita, the lack of institutional social support in the Mexican educational system forced her to drop out of school. The lack of social support groups affected her at different times in her life in México, twice during her high school years and then during her vocational program. However, a stark contrast is seen when students have social support systems available. Altbach (2004) notes how college students (e.g., international) who have parents, extended family, and friends helps with the transition to a new culture and in the school environment. In my study transfronterizo students, like Isabel, Estefania, Cecilia, shared that having a family member (e.g., parent, sibling, and extended family member) facilitated their transition to attending school in the United States. What are colleges and universities doing in order to help students assimilate and integrate to a new campus, context, or even culture?

Margarita’s views of education and outlook on life have changed as she recounts each detail of her educational experience in both the American and the Mexican school systems. She asserted, “I feel it’s an opportunity and obligation to go to college.” Margarita felt that earning a master’s degree would make a person a valuable asset for the country and the U.S. economy. She believed that “it is a person or individual’s obligation or duty to be educated and to strive for a master’s degree.” She noted that earning a master’s degree in the long run offered someone a status of value or an asset. Margarita’s citizenship status has given her the opportunity to excel in the American educational system. She views education as a responsibility and duty of being a

productive citizen in the United States. At the end of the interview, Margarita reflected on how her citizenship status had given her a second chance to restart her life in the United States.

Opportunity is the primary influence for transfronterizos college students to study in the U.S. (Chávez Montaña, 2006, p. 10-11). This was something that was shared by students through their interviews with me. Transfronterizo students would say that their parents pressed the importance of studying in the U.S. because this would afford them better job opportunities after college. That is to say, for the majority of transfronterizo college students, the need of having financial stability plays an important role in their academic life. Yet, financial burdens are not the only hindrance encountered by students. As previously noted, other factors include scholarships, grants, and job opportunities.

Mauricio Chávez Montaña (2006), argues that transfronterizo college students have “potentiality,” which is attained through education, due to their ability to navigate both cultures, the formation of skills and knowledge acquired throughout their life offers them many opportunities and advantages in the U.S. to succeed. Transfronterizo college students have the potential to become something more by reaching their self-actualization through education. This is only possible because of the advantages and opportunities granted by their citizenship status, which provides access to the resources of two nations. These students also acquire and form skills that will help them thrive in the future (Chávez Montaña, 2006; Tessman & Koyama, 2017). Isabel was born in El Paso, Texas but raised in Chihuahua, México. She eventually moved to Ciudad Juárez, México. Her elementary school years were split between attending schools in Chihuahua City and Juárez. During her middle school years, she transferred to an American school in El Paso, Texas. One of the main reasons she transferred schools was the

eruption of the narco violence in 2008 when the Sinaloa cartel tried to take control of Ciudad Juárez. Isabel remarked:

Back in the Fall of 2010, when I was about to be an eighth grader, that is when I started school in El Paso and that is when my parents said, “You need to go”, I have always wanted to come over here, my brother did not but it did change us as a person and education-wise. According to our parents the U.S. offers better opportunities to find jobs because México is running out of jobs.

Isabel’s dream had always been to come to the United States to attend school. Her dream was realized in fall 2010 when her parents decided to enroll her in an American school. This decision was not an easy one for her parents, but her status as a citizen of the U.S. offered her the ability to escape the violence in Ciudad Juárez, unlike other school peers.

Other transfronterizo college students had similar outlooks. The majority of the transfronterizo college students acknowledged that at times their lifestyle was too demanding and difficult to continue. At times, they questioned and considered quitting school, but they understood the consequences of what life would be like living in México. However, they knew that if they persevered with the education in the U.S. that their opportunities, and benefits from completing their academic goals were well worth it in the end. Alejandro is a U.S. citizen who lives in Ciudad Juárez with his parents but stays with his aunt during the weekdays in El Paso in order to attend UTEP. He recalls that staying at his aunt’s house was awkward most of the time and he preferred to stay at home with his parents where he felt more comfortable. Alejandro revealed, “I always knew that I had to move to El Paso for my degree, so I had the opportunity and took it. At the beginning I was not convinced at all then I knew when I attended UTEP that I had made the correct choice.” He understood that eventually he would have to relocate to El Paso to continue college. So, when the opportunity presented itself he took it. However, he has encountered many hardships and difficult times. At times he has questioned his transnational life

but understands that his economic and employment opportunities will increase in the future as a result of it. This view was common among most of the transnational students. They understood that hardships and difficulties would be temporary and that advantages would come in the future. Just as Alejandro described, at times, it can be difficult coming over to the U.S. for an education, Gabriela and Arturo displayed the same sentiment when talking about their transnational lives and the hardships they encounter. Gabriela, a U.S. citizen, has been a transfronteriza college student her entire life since she started her education in the U.S. She explained that during her childhood years she was not a U.S. citizen and was exposed to the abuses of power, mistreatment, and belittling actions and behaviors of the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents. For Gabriela it was difficult and painful to relive her childhood experiences crossing the U.S.-México border. She shared:

As a child, I felt vulnerable, it was hard physically on me, I was tired of waking up so early to always behave a certain way. I knew I didn't have citizenship. When I was little (a child) and not a citizen, I always felt vulnerable at the border and I remember my mom telling my dad, she was harassed and yelled at by the CPB agent. I was very young, but I can still feel it.

For Gabriela, her early childhood experiences as a transfronteriza student are traumatic, she vividly described that the memories of her childhood are difficult to recall and even now, years later, she still feels vulnerable. Still, these experiences do not overshadow her ability to pursue an American education. Gabriela stated, "I am grateful every day that I studied in the U.S. I have an American passport and take advantage of a lot of the opportunities. It is hard because you get the short end of the stick sometimes, but the benefits are worth it."

As a child, Gabriela's transnational life was a difficult one. She noted that even though it was difficult waking up every morning and traveling to El Paso, she feels like the shortcoming, hardships, and struggles are well worth it in the end. Later, during the interview, she remarked, "I

no longer felt vulnerable when I cross the border once I became an American citizen at the age of 18. I am a citizen now, I have rights.” Gabriela reflects and acknowledges that her vulnerability was created from her citizenship status, which created an environment of despair, fear, and hopelessness every time she crossed the international port of entry. Now, Gabriela explains:

I am grateful every day that I studied in the U.S.... Being bicultural, bilingual being able to adopt a lot of different cultures has been helpful. I know what is like to be an outsider and foreigner.

Gabriela acknowledges that her citizenship and binational statuses have provided her the opportunity to be educated in the U.S. as well as the opportunity of living a transnational life.

This view reflects the research findings of Patricia Sanchez (2001) where she describes the legal status as a U.S. citizen for the majority of the transfronterizo students and found that students were able to navigate the borderland space and the privilege of living transnationally (p. 375).

Arturo was born in El Paso but spent most of his life living in Ciudad Juárez. He completed all of his basic elementary school years and the first year of middle school in Ciudad Juárez. Arturo noted that he had a very close relationship with his mother growing up, which made it difficult to be apart from her. Arturo transferred to an El Paso school prior to the start of his eight-grade year and for the first few months his mother would accompany and commute with him. Then, her visa expired, and this prevented her from continuing to commute with him. His father works in El Paso and he would rent an apartment that they would use from time to time but the separation between his father and mother was unbearable. Arturo eventually moved back to Ciudad Juárez to live with his mother, but his father kept the apartment in El Paso to be used occasionally. Arturo shared, “You have so much opportunity here you cannot fail because in México if you fail that is it and that pushes me here.”

As previously noted a weak economy and infrastructure are major factors for individuals to migrate from their native homelands (Chávez Montaña, 2006, p. 10). Arturo affirmed that once you fail in México there were no second chances given to you to succeed. He mentions that in the U.S. there were so many opportunities offered that it seems impossible for a person to fail. Arturo uses this concept of “failure” as an aspiration to continue regardless of the hardships and difficulties he might encounter. Like most transfronterizo college students, his citizenship status offered opportunities to be successful in academia.

Adrian was born in El Paso, Texas but spent most of his childhood in Ciudad Juárez. He completed his elementary school years in Ciudad Juárez attending a private school. His family moved to California for a few years where he finished middle school in the public school system. Later, his family would move back to Ciudad Juárez and once more resumed crossing the border to attend high school in El Paso and eventually enrolled at UTEP. Adrian commented:

My freshman year of high school was the first time attending school in the U.S. My cousin was studying there (Ysleta high school) so they told me to go there. I was living with my uncle at the time. All my cousins and all my friends crossed [the border] with me during high school. Well you are a U.S. citizen, you get a passport card, and you can use it to cross the border faster.

For Adrian having family in El Paso was a great help during his high school years. He stayed with his uncle who provided a place for him in order to avoid crossing the border every day. Additionally, having his cousins attend the same high school offered a social support group. Tam Le and Susan K. Gardner (2010) suggest that international students need financial support, support from the faculty, and support from peers and other graduate students in order to succeed in college (p. 257). The majority of the students in this current study encountered the same situation where the need for social support was paramount to excel in their education (Le & Gardner, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). For example, for

Adrian having his extended family as social support not only provided a place to live during the school week but they also helped him avoid some of the most common difficulties transnational students encounter in their daily commute such as crossing the border every day, long morning lines at the port of entry, waking up early in order to be on time, and interacting with CBP agents. Additionally, his cousins helped him navigate with ease his new high school environment.

Rosalinda is a U.S. citizen who spent her childhood years in Durango, México. She completed her basic elementary and middle school education in México. Before she started her high school education her family moved to California for a few months, then to Maryland, and finally to El Paso. In 2017, she moved to Ciudad Juárez because her sister moved back to Durango, México and her roommate got married. Once she relocated to Ciudad Juárez, she resumed her transnational life in order to attend UTEP.

Rosalinda was considered a mobile student during her formative school years. This means that a student changes schools other than when they are promoted from one grade to the next (Rumberger, 2003, p. 6). Russell W. Rumberger (2003) suggests that students may suffer psychologically, socially, and academically as a result of mobility. Student mobility varies widely. Literature is inconclusive on what are the effects of mobility and academic achievement on students. This mobility factor is outside the focus and scope of this current study, further research is required to explore the association and relationship between a student's mobility and academic outcomes. Hence, in the case of Rosalinda and other transnational, binational, transfronterizos(as), border crossers, and transborder students who identify as mobility students the questions remain: what impacts or effects does mobility have on students and how does this affect their academic outcomes at the college level?

THE CHANGING NATIONAL STATUS OF TRANSFRONTERIZO STUDENTS

The current political climate of the United States is a difficult and unsettling one for people identifying as Latino/a/x, Hispanic, Chicano/a/x, and Mexican American. Donald Trump and members of his administration have attacked the Latino/a/x population fueling an anti-immigrant sentiment centered on hostility and fear. The Trump Administration's challenges and attacks connected with immigration policy, policing, immigrant detention, and family separation, among others, affect (im)migrants' lives. Transfronterizo college students have been affected in different ways depending on their background, family, and legal status. Several of the students in my study voiced their concerns about the Trump administration. Gabriela commented, "I know I can always go back to (Juárez) if I need to. Especially now [that current President-elect Donald Trump] like at least I'm close to Ciudad Juárez, I know I can run away if I need to. In an emergency, I can run back to Ciudad Juárez." The majority of the participants in this study felt as though the Trump Administration was targeting Latinos indiscriminately. They felt that Trump was attacking, not just (im)migrants, but all people who identify as Latino, Chicano, Mexican, and Mexican American. Some of the concerns of the participants were about how the political climate, future immigration actions by the federal government, and their own family legal status will affect them in the future. Most of the students expressed concerns that Latino families will be separated.

Though respondents were concerned with the current political climate, the reality was that they live their lives bi-nationally. The El Paso-Juárez port of entry is considered the second largest land port between the U.S. and México, where three million passenger vehicles, three hundred commercial and four million pedestrians vehicles cross each year (USCIS, 2018). Transfronterizo college students are a part of this environment on a daily basis. Patricia Sánchez (2001) argues that transnationalism is not a new or recent phenomenon but an ongoing

occurrence or way of life on the border. She notes that many transfronterizo students have been living transnational lives throughout their childhoods on the borderlands. This association is similar to the experiences many of the transfronterizo college students in this study have lived their entire lives. Many of the study participants have crossed the border at different times during their childhood, teenage years, and young adult lives while others still maintain their transnational lifestyle all their lives. One primary concern the majority of the students would relate to during their commute is the “nervousness” most felt while crossing the port of entry.

Gabriela commented:

When I was little and not a citizen, I knew I didn't have citizenship, I was very young but I can still feel it. I always felt vulnerable at the border. I remember my mom telling me my dad was harassed and yelled at by a border patrol agent. I no longer feel vulnerable when I cross the border once I became an American citizen at the age of 18. I am a citizen now I have rights. I am a U.S. citizen crossing into the U.S. stresses me out and crossing into México does not.

The sentiment felt by Gabriela is common among transfronterizo students. Their educational journey has taken a heavy toll on them at times due to their constant and mundane routine. The long and difficult commute when crossing the border is one of the few challenges transfronterizo college students like Gabriela and others encounter every day. Gabriela states that, at times, it is challenging emotionally and problematic when crossing the border because CBP agents make it difficult.

The majority of the transnational students mentioned events or situations in their lives when CBP agents harassed, discriminated, and bullied commuters and students alike when crossing the border. This environment creates a system of terror, anxiety, and traumatic encounters between transnational students and CBP personnel. In the vignette above, Gabriela recalls and reflects on her own experiences as a transfronteriza student as a negative, traumatic, and deeply impacting episode in her young life. Gabriela's inexperience and youth did not offer

an understanding of the significance of her lack of citizenship status, which weighed heavily on her throughout her childhood. Later in life, as a transfronteriza college student with a naturalized U.S. citizenship status, she realized how her own lack of citizenship status during her childhood created an environment that subjugated, marginalized, and oppressed her while making her feel defenseless, powerless, abused, neglected and vulnerable every time she crossed the border to attend school in the United States. While her citizenship status changed, now as an American citizen, she feels empowered. The right of citizenship has provided her the access to navigate a space that for many years made her feel vulnerable, voiceless, and unable to do anything about it.

Like Gabriela, Ricardo experienced a similar situation as a young transfronterizo student. Ricardo was born in Quintana Roo, México, and his family moved to Ciudad Juárez when he was ten years old. He attended the local Mexican school that housed kinder to high school because of the population of the rural town. He completed his elementary and middle school education in México and later migrated to the United States. Ricardo expressed great passion and admiration for the United States, even since a young child living in México. He explains that he could see the United States from his front yard and always wondered how different it would be to live in the U.S. He perceived the United States as a magnificent place to visit one-day. His curiosity and motivation encouraged him to migrate alone to the U.S. at the age of thirteen. He explains that one day he collected a few of his possessions and crossed the border with a small caravan of people. Ricardo recalled:

I really, really wanted to be in the U.S. as a child I was thirteen years old, decided to cross the border and go to high school. I learned English though but I was undocumented, so my education in Texas began even with no records (refers to no records existed of him in the U.S.).

When he first arrived in the U.S., he contacted his aunt's family and his life in the U.S. began. Ricardo always understood and acknowledged his nationality and migratory status. He would

finish the first two years of high school before deciding to return to México. He explains that was a smart choice because his mother and he would later become permanent U.S. residents (Green Card Holders) through the USCIS family member petition process. He later became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Ricardo noted that the main reason why he decided to return to México was because the small rural Texas town where lived was mainly composed of CBP personnel. He comments that you could see agents everywhere and explained that they (towns people) eventually become acquaintances and later friends. The environment in this small rural town was easy going but he maintained his guard and awareness of his undocumented status. Ricardo commented:

The U.S. has always been an inspiring country for me, I had visited the country before I wasn't allowed to visit anymore they had this type of passport when I was a child I had access to then it was a time I couldn't cross anymore and it went like that for many years. I saw the benefit when registering for a high school and for learning English I did well as you can hear (refers his language fluency) that was because I was afraid of being an undocumented student in the U.S., it was a two year stay in the U.S. that I did but I always had in mind that I was not allowed to be in there. Eventually, my mother, I became residents (refers to permanent residents).

In the case of Ricardo, he always dreamed of visiting the United States and when the opportunity arose he took it without any hesitation. Shortly after arriving into the U.S., he was welcomed by his aunt and her family who housed him during his short stay in the country. Accomplishing some of the goals and dreams he had envisioned as a young child he decided to go back to México. Ricardo acknowledged that his lack of citizenship status did not allow him to be in the United States. From an early age, he understood that his nationality and migratory status were the reasons why he had limitations and restrictions when remaining in the United States. Once Ricardo was established in El Paso he tried to return to his old high school in order to attain his diploma. He would find out that attending high school would not be possible because of age requirements, since Texas education did not allow a person older than twenty-one

to attend high school. He would ultimately complete his GED and enroll at El Paso Community College (EPCC). Because of his early experiences between the U.S. and México he has maintained a transfronterizo lifestyle. During his undergraduate and graduate college years, Ricardo resided in both Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. In regard to Ricardo's transfronterizo experiences, he recalls that during his college years he had access and the ability to use resources in both El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. By using these resources, benefits, and opportunities afforded by his U.S. citizenship status he was able to complete his academic goals. Ricardo describes his college experiences through a binational lens that utilizes the best resources, benefits, and opportunities of both communities in order to attain his academic degrees. Transfronterizo college students like Gabriela and Ricardo have experienced life with different statuses of nationality (e.g., Mexican citizens, U.S. permanent resident, U.S. naturalized citizen). Their experiences show us the tenacity of transfronterizo college students living in the borderlands while encountering anti-immigrant sentiment in U.S. culture. These findings provide a stark contrast to the rhetoric of Donald Trump and his administration's claims against Latino/a/xs.

Chapter 7: Summary and Discussion

This study investigates how transfronterizo students have benefited from their U.S. citizenship status as residents of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as well as the limits of that citizenship. The majority of the transfronterizo college students in this study agreed about the importance of their U.S. citizenship status. The various benefits provided by their U.S. birth certificate such as having the ability to insert themselves into the social structure of a population or nation with greater socio-economic development, facilitating access to public resources, public education, reduction of cost of college or university fees in the U.S., allows and permits entry to the U.S. labor market. For instance, for those school children born in the U.S. no

restrictions exist to cross the port of entry and the border. On the other hand, school children born in México and other nations may not be provided the same kind of opportunities. These findings from this study suggest that as transfronterizo college students grow-up they possess greater power, command, and management of their educational careers. Their experiences show us the tenacity of transfronterizo college students living in the borderlands while encountering barriers, limitations and hardships, which stem from within the American and Mexican cultures.

The findings and main themes of this study were consistent with the existing literature on transfronterizos college students. For instance, the majority of the transfronterizo college students in this study acknowledge the importance of financial difficulties, stressors, limitations, prejudices, biases, institutional barriers, benefits, opportunities, citizenship status, affect their academic goals and students' experiences at UTEP. Previous research has focused on students' experiences, language issues, classroom interactions, discriminations, biases and assimilation to the host culture. In contrast, this study explores, examines, and explains how transfronterizo college students use their citizenship status as tool and mechanism to access resources, opportunities and benefits of two communities, states, and countries to be successful in higher education.

I found that citizenship status provides transfronterizo college students some financial stability. The research findings of the current study suggest that citizenship status prevents transfronterizo college students from dropping out of school, offers them an opportunity to move to the U.S., and the ability for transfronterizos to continue their education. Still, contrary to the positive aspects of citizenship status it does not protect against financial burdens, which hinder higher education attainment for some transfronterizos.

One of the most interesting and surprising findings of the current study is the utilization of the concept of “hiding.” Patricia Sanchez’s (2001) concept of “hiding” explains the way in which she separates herself from her transnational life. In the current study, I encountered a similar situation when transfronterizo college students concealed or camouflaged their transnational experience from peers, faculty, and administration. Normally, this concept has been used in the formative school years, the current study explores the concept of “hiding” during the transfronterizos college years. The concept of “hiding” proved to be a defensive mechanism that allowed students to address prejudices and biases. Students were able to use this in order to protect their identity and avoid unnecessary confrontations. In today’s current political climate, with constant attacks on Latinos(as) by Donald Trump and his administration/base this type of concealment is a useful strategy for those who want to avoid harassment, prejudices, and biases.

I also found that while transfronterizo college students may have U.S. citizenship, they felt that their “Mexican” ancestry overshadowed their citizenship. This created difficulties because transfronterizo college students felt like outsiders or foreigners in the United States. Though transfronterizo students used their U.S. citizenship to take advantage of educational opportunities, their educational journey was a difficult because they would encounter racism, discriminations, prejudice behaviors and act from peers. Still, transfronterizo college students found that completing their academic goals was well worth it.

The transfronterizo college students in my study experienced negative interactions with CBP agents, particularly at ports of entry, and this created fear and terror among some students. Situations such as these illuminate the many challenges experienced by students during their daily commutes. Still, transfronterizo college students with U.S. citizenship found that

citizenship was a mechanism of privilege. In another words, their citizenship status offered benefits, rights, and opportunities.

My current study offers evidence that transfronterizo college students take control of their own personal and academic goals in higher education. The study findings explore how the majority of transfronterizo college students manage the different tensions of financial difficulties, obstacles, and hardships to succeed in achieving their academic goals in higher education. In the current study, the research findings suggest that transfronterizo college students adapt to their environment by using their citizenship status. This privileged status of U.S. citizenship allows transfronterizo college students the ability to access resources, lean on family for support, and access the opportunities and benefits from two nations, two cultures, two communities in order to succeed in their academic life. Still, though citizenship status offers protections, benefits, opportunities there are other factors such as financial burdens, prejudices, biases that hinder the academic attainment of transfronterizo college students.

Chapter 8: Limitations

I experienced a few limitations as part of this study. One of the issues I found was that the current political climate in the U.S. created a difficult environment for transfronterizo college students. Some students did not want to take part in this study because Donald Trump's xenophobic and racist rhetoric was intimidating. They felt as though Latinos/as, and more specifically people of Mexican descent were targets of this hatred. Several participants voiced concerns that data from this study might be damaging, though they were reassured that their names would remain confidential.

Though twenty-three students participated from UTEP, it would have been beneficial to also gather the experiences of students at other institutions of higher learning in El Paso. It also may have been useful to share transcribed interviews with research participants in order to expand on issues that they experienced when it came to their transfronterizo lives. This would have allowed them to reflect on some of what they had previously shared with interviewers. It may have also been beneficial to expand on people's experiences when it came to differences in socio-economic status (SES). This would have allowed me to expand on how along with U.S. citizenship SES provides people with social mobility and access to higher education in the United States.

Chapter 9: Future research

I found that parents and family in this research wanted their children to have better employment opportunities than what they had experienced in México. This often led to the assumption that U.S. citizenship would result in better educational opportunities in the United States that would translate to successful career opportunities. In the future researchers may want to interview the parents of transfronterizo students in order to learn more about the diverse histories and opportunities of transfronterizo families. Future research may also focus on transfronterizo students that are Mexican nationals. There were a total of three Mexican nationals in this study, future research may explore the ways in which transfronterizo students with Mexican citizenship experience higher education in the United States. This would be useful in providing more insight to the discussion on the significance of citizenship status in the lives of transfronterizo students. Finally, future researchers may expand on the ways in which social constructions and categories impact transfronterizo students. That is, examining the intersectional statuses of race, social class, gender, and sexuality, to name a few, may provide greater insight into the transfronterizo experience.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study explores the lives, commutes, and college experiences of transfronterizo students with U.S. citizenship attending college in the United States. Using a conceptual framework of cultural citizenship that addresses the way in which dominant values, norms, and beliefs are held as normative when compared to those of groups considered as “the other”, in the case of my research project, transfronterizo students, as having cultural deficits because of their relationship to México. For instance, I found that the transfronterizo students in my research are marginalized at the port of entry, on campus, and especially in their interactions with peers. Transfronterizo college students are affected culturally because they are considered second-class citizens. Though, transfronterizo college students have U.S. citizenship and this is supposed to protect them legally, their cultural situation, as transfronterizo students, affects their everyday experiences. The findings from this study suggest that citizenship status impacts transfronterizo college students in different areas of their lives and affects their academic attainment. For example, some of the factors that affect transfronterizo college students in higher education are financial stressors, notions of “hiding,” personal obstacles, marginalization, institutional barriers and benefits affect transfronterizo college students’ academic goals in higher education in the United States.

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Appendix A Terms and Definitions

Transfronterizo college students can be considered a type of transnational student because they move internationally when they cross the U.S.–México border, develop binational social networks, and in their daily activities they acquire human capital in both countries. However, transfronterizo students are not migrants. They cross the border on a daily or weekly basis while living in México and immersing themselves in a transborder life (Orraca, Rocha, and Vargas 2017).

Term	Definition
International	A person or an individual who is enrolled for credit at an accredited institution of higher education in the U.S. on a temporary visa. International students usually need an F-1 or J-1 visa to study in the United States. A person or individual who is not an immigrant (permanent resident with an I-51 or Green Card), or an undocumented immigrant, or a refugee.
Transfronterizo (also referred to in the literature as transborder, commuter, and border-crosser)	<p>A person or individual who crosses the U.S.–México border on a regular basis and whose life straddles two social, cultural, and linguistic worlds. Additionally, they have interconnection internationally between two cities, aided primarily through their accumulation of cultural capital, linguistic ability, and educational experience.</p> <p>Transfronterizos can be either U.S. citizens or Mexican nationals. If they are Mexican nationals, they may require access to an F1/M-1 student visa, a B-1/B-2 tourist visa or I-586 or BCC (border crossing card) for school attendance.</p>

APPENDIX B Interview Guide-Border Crossing Students

Demographics

Country of Permanent Residence: _____ Age: _____

Gender: A. male B. Female C. Other _____ Undergraduate/Graduate

Major: _____ Number of Children: _____ Occupation _____

Citizenship: Where you born? _____

If born outside of the U.S. what type of visa do you have? A. 1-20 B. B1/B2 border crossing card C. Other _____ Where was your mother born? _____ Where was your father born _____

Education

Do you consider El Paso or Juárez your home? Why?

When did you start your education in Texas?

If student was a minor when they started attending school in *the* US then:

Who did you live with?

Did you cross the border by yourself?

Have you attended school in México?

Describe your normal day as a border-crossing student?

Does being a border-crossing student affect your relationship with your family?

How do you think your experiences as a student compared to those who are not a border-crossing student?

How can the educational system be more accommodate to you?

What are the overall benefits associated with being a border-crossing student?

Gender

How did your gender shape or determine if you would become a border-crossing student?

How do you think gender norms differ in the U.S. versus México?

Do you think your gender identity matters in how well you adjust to the educational system in the U.S.?

How does being educated in the U.S. influence your immediate/nuclear family life in México?
US?

Are there any gendered expectations of border crossing students? Explain.

What are your long-term academic goals? How about professional goals?

Border

What are your experiences at the U.S. port of entry? What are your experiences with CBP? How about the Mexican port of entry?

On average how long does it take to cross into the U.S.? Into México?

University of Texas (UTEP)

If UTEP decided to create a branch campus in Ciudad Juárez, México would you attend? Why? Why not?

Reflection

Is there anything else that I did not ask you that you consider being important in understanding your experiences either of crossing the border to study in the US or adjusting to the U.S. educational system or to living on the Mexican side of the border while being educated in the U.S.?

APPENDIX C Thematic Codes

Student Citizenship	<p>What is the citizenship of the participant?</p> <p>How does the participant self-identify as?</p>
Language proficiency	<p>What is the language use at home?</p> <p>What is the language that the participant uses the most?</p> <p>What is the language participant uses the most with siblings at home?</p> <p>What is the language participant uses the most with friends at school?</p> <p>What is the language participant uses the most with siblings at school?</p>
Parentocracy	<p>What some of the parent decision made by Fronterizo parents in regards to their children?</p> <p>What additional classes did parents enrolled participants to take in school?</p> <p>Did children participate in extracurricular activities?</p> <p>Does the participant have knowledge whose decision was to attend school in the U.S.? in México?</p>
Mother	<p>Does the participant have mother? Father during school years?</p> <p>Did the participant live with mother in México? In the U.S.? Are parents separated? Married? Divorced? Re-married?</p>
Father	<p>Did the participant live with father in México? In the U.S.? Are parents separated? Married? Divorced? Re-married?</p>
Grandparents	<p>Does the participant have grandparents?</p> <p>What is the grandparent's citizenship status? Educational background?</p> <p>Are the grandparent's parts of the participant's education? In what ways?</p>
Aunt(s)	<p>Does the participant have an aunt(s)?</p> <p>What is your aunt citizenship status? Educational background?</p> <p>Does the participant aunt reside in the U.S.? in México?</p> <p>Has the participant ever lived with aunt(s) and/or aunt's family for school purposes?</p> <p>Did the participant use aunt home address for school purposes?</p>
Uncle(s)	<p>Does the participant have an uncle(s)?</p> <p>What is your uncle citizenship status? Educational background?</p> <p>Does the participant uncle live in the U.S.? in México?</p> <p>Has the participant ever lived with uncle and/or uncle's family for school purposes?</p> <p>Did the participant use aunt home address for school purposes?</p>
Family	<p>Does the participant has an open communication channel family about problems?</p> <p>In what ways does your family helps you?</p> <p>Does your family support your educational goals?</p> <p>What does the participant believes are the weaknesses of his/her family?</p> <p>What does the participant believes are the strengths of his/her</p>

	family?
Extended family	Does the participant have a cousin(s)? Does the participant cousin's reside in the U.S.? in México? Has the participant ever lived with extended family for school purposes? Does participant have a cousin(s) who attend the same school? Different school? Are in the same grade?
Siblings	Does the participant have a sibling(s)? How many? What is the participant's sibling's citizenship? Educational background? Are the participant's sibling(s) older? Younger?
Border	Does the participant cross the port of entry daily? Weekly? Does participant cross the port of entry walking? By Car? Does the participant crosses the port of entry by himself/herself? What are the interactions between the participant and with the CBP agents? What are the interactions between the participant's family and with the CBP agents? What are the interactions between the participant's father and with the CBP agents? What are you interactions between the participant and with the different race, gender and ethnicity of CBP agents? Has the participant ever felt discriminated? prejudices against? Biases against? Does the participant have the ready pass? What are the participant's interactions with the Mexican border and customs agents? Does the participant ever feel his/her gender affect their interactions with CBP agents? How? Does the participant ever feel his/her citizenship affect their interactions with CBP agents? How? Does the participant ever feel his/her ethnicity affect their interactions with CBP agents? How? Does the participant ever feel his/her outer appearance affect their interactions with CBP agents? How?
U.S. Education	Did the participant ever attend school in the U.S.? Elementary? Middle school? High school?
Mexican education	Did the participant ever attend school in México? Elementary? Middle school? High school?
English	Does the participant speak English fluently? Has the participant ever encounter prejudices? Biases? Or belittling because of their language English proficiency? Does the participant speak another language?
Spanish	Does the participant speak Spanish fluently? Has the participant ever encounter prejudices? Biases? Or belittling because of their Spanish language proficiency?

	Does the participant speak another language?
Private education	Has the participant ever attend private education in elementary? Middle school? High school? What are the things the participant likes the most from the school? What are the things the participant likes the least from the school?
Public education	Has the participant ever attend public education in elementary? Middle school? High school? What are the things the participant likes the most from the school? What are the things the participant likes the least from the school?
Finances	Does the participant work? Full-time? Part-time? Does the participant participate in the financial aid program? Scholarships? Grants? Loans? Has the participant ever been denied financial aid? Why? Has the participant ever been denied grants? Why? Has the participant ever been denied scholarships? Why? Does the participant's parents help with tuition? Other school expenses? Has the participant ever encounter or experience a personal financial difficulty in their lives? During college? Has the participant ever encounter or experience a family financial difficulty in their lives? During college? Has the participant ever stop attending college because of financial reasons?
Higher education	What is your major? When did you enroll at UTEP? What is the participant's GPA? What are the participant's short-term educational plans? Long-term plans? Has the participant consider attending graduate school? Other graduate programs? Has the participant ever work or being employed during his/her college years? What are the interactions between the participant and with the school personnel? What are the interactions between the participant and with the university faculty? What are the interactions between the participant and with their major advisors? What are you interactions between the participant and with the different race? Gender? Ethnicity? of university faculty? Has the participant ever felt discriminated? prejudices against? Biases against on campus? Has the participant ever encounter or experience any interactions with CBP agents on campus?
Ethnicity	Has the participant ever encounter or experience any prejudice? Biases? Stereotypes because of his/her ancestry?

	<p>Has the participant ever been stop or question by CBP because of ethnicity? His/her ancestry?</p> <p>Has the participant encounter racism because of ancestry?</p>
Financial burdens	<p>Has the participant encounter or encounter any financial difficulties in school?</p> <p>Has the participant's family ever encounter or experience any financial difficulties that resulted in moving? Outside the U.S.?</p>
Parents citizenship	<p>What is the mother's citizenship status?</p> <p>What is the father's citizenship status?</p>
Parents education	<p>What is the mother's educational background?</p> <p>What is the father's educational background?</p>
Prejudices/Biases	<p>Has the participant ever encounter or experience any Prejudice? Racism by peers? By peers in class? By peers on campus? By peers at work on campus?</p>

Vita

Mendoza was born in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México. Mendoza enlisted in the United States Armed Forces after high school and honorably enlisted for nine year. He enrolled in and attended evening college classes during his military service. After his military service commitment Mendoza continued his educational goals by attending El Paso Community College (EPCC). After receiving his Associates of Science Degree, he transferred to the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) earning a double major in psychology and sociology. In spring 2015, as an undergraduate college student, he was accepted in to undergraduate fast-track program and began taking courses toward his Master of Arts in Sociology at UTEP. Mendoza was an undergraduate/graduate teaching assistant for the sociology and philosophy departments at UTEP. In collaboration with Dr. Morales, he published, “Seeking the American Dream Along the U.S.-México Border” in 2018.

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