“You Know Two Versions and It Gives You More Insight”:

Cross-Border Mobility and Critical Cosmopolitanism among South Texas University Students

*On the border,*

*conflict of the heart or of the nation*

*has but one cure:*

*recognition of jointness*

* Oscar Martínez, *Border People* (1994, p. 117)

**Executive Summary/Abstract**

***Background:*** A growing body of literature addresses the experiences of transnational students, but relatively little research has focused on students who cross international borders on a regular basis. The role of cross-border mobility in shaping students’ *transfronterizo* (border-crossing) identities is key to understanding their educational and social subjectivities.

***Purpose/Focus of Study:*** Using a combination of the following frameworks: border theory, the new mobilities paradigm, and critical cosmopolitanism, the study explores university students’ lived experiences of cross-border mobility at a time of upheaval in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

***Research Design:*** An insider-outsider researcher and two undergraduate insiders collaborated to design and implement the study. An online survey was used to gather basic information about students’ cross-border mobility and educational experiences; subsequently, 16 focal participants were selected to participate in ethnographic interviews. Qualitative data were analyzed with software using a two-cycle coding process and triangulated with descriptive statistics from the survey.

***Findings:*** Cross-border mobility offered academic and social benefits to the participants, but the benefits of mobility were inextricable from its drawbacks. Participants acknowledged the practical difficulties associated with cross-border mobility; they also believed that these difficulties made them more responsible and successful. In addition, while participants relayed the violence in their *transfronterizo* realities, they also drew from their abilities to navigate these realities by employing a powerful form of insight that emerged from “knowing two versions,” (one from each side of the border) of events.

***Conclusions:*** The results invite us to more critically engage with the critical cosmopolitan voices of students from areas often regarded as sites of marginality, poverty, and violence, such as the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The participants’ meaning-making process of their *transfronterizo* experiences provided them the opportunity to construct, traverse and inhabit a wider range of emotional geographies where they could make sense of their relationships to people, events, and places on both sides of the border. Participants’ *transfronterizo* identities simultaneously challenged and benefited them; it allowed them to see, live and draw from both sides of the borderland.

**Introduction**

Mary was an elementary bilingual education major who had taken my course on diverse learners at the University of Texas at Brownsville, located directly on the U.S.-Mexico border in South Texas. Like many of my students, Mary regularly spent time on both sides of the border, but her patterns of movement across the border had been inconsistent throughout her life. As a young child, Mary lived in the Mexican border city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas but had crossed to Brownsville, Texas every weekday with her parents. When Mary was eight years old, her family moved to Brownsville permanently, but continued crossing the border at least once a week to visit relatives in Mexico. Things changed dramatically for Mary around 2008, due to what Correa-Cabrera (2014) has called the paramilitarization of organized crime and the corresponding loss of the Mexican state’s monopoly on violence in Tamaulipas state (and elsewhere in Mexico). For a few years, the fluid transborder milieu of Mary’s childhood was a distant memory: out of fear, she almost never crossed the border. By 2014, the situation in Matamoros seemed to have stabilized, and Mary resumed crossing on a weekly basis, especially to help her grandmother with errands and appointments.

This trajectory, it turned out, was broadly similar to the trajectories of some of the other student-participants in my study of cross-border mobility and higher education (see Table 1). In addition to the possibility of experiencing violence in Mexico – which was, indeed, a reality for some students – *transfronterizo*, or border-crossing, students faced other significant challenges in pursuing higher education in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Whether their lives were primarily based in the U.S. or Mexico at the time of the study, participants saw the difficulties of being a *transfronterizo* student as essentially inextricable from the benefits: the same dangers, hassles, and complications that made life challenging also paid off in unexpected ways, with profound implications for students’ lives.

In this article, I argue that *transfronterizo* university students’ experiences provided them the opportunity to “know two versions” of border stories – as the title of the article suggests – and, ultimately, pull off an astute cross-border balancing act (Rabinow, 1986). Students whose voices are often dismissed as marginal, from a region often described in terms of poverty, criminality, and violence, emerged as perceptive critics of educational and social realities, crediting their *visión* (insight) to the regular borderwork that gave them opportunities “to reassess their relations with … (multiple) communities to which they [might] or [might] not belong” (Rumford, 2014, p. 4).

The findings are directly relevant to teachers and researchers who work with students in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and to those who work with other students with transnational experiences and connections. This is not to say that transnational students’ experiences will necessarily resemble each other; in particular, given a widespread tendency to homogenize Latino/a and immigrant lives, approaching questions of transnationalism in education must involve “unknowing,” or adopting a stance of openness that allows for vast differences in how transnationalism is lived and experienced across ethnic groups, families, and individuals (Villenas, 2009; see also Zentella, 1996). The broader relevance of these findings, rather, is that they invite educators and scholars to consider how specific forms of mobility can reshape students’ lives and subjectivities (cf. Conradson & McKay, 2007) under particular sociohistorical circumstances. In the following section, I situate this study within the existing literature on transnationalism and education.

**The “Persistently Transnational” Lives of *Transfronterizo* University Students**

Transnationalism is an increasingly visible concern in studies of education and immigration (see, e.g., Suárez-Orozco, Darbes, Dias & Sutin, 2011; Warriner, 2008), particularly with respect to children and youth who do not merely settle in a “receiving” country, but whose lives involve *vaivén,* or coming and going across national boundaries (Duany, 2000; Vertovec, 2009). Sánchez and Machado-Casas (2009) contend that transnationalism, defined broadly as people’s maintenance of “ ‘multiple relations’ – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, etc. – across two or more societies” spanning national boundaries (p. 5, citing Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992), is a primary difference between so-called “new” immigration and older waves. Thus, educational research must account for the complexity of students’ and families’ transnational lives in a globalizing era, including differences in social class, immigration generation, level of transnational engagement, legal status, and so on (Sánchez & Machado-Casas, 2009, pp. 6-7), introducing a dynamic that is “too often … left out of discussions and research on immigrant students and … schooling” (p. 9). Villenas (2009) argues for a historicizing view of transnational lives that attends carefully to specific circumstances of migration and mobility and the various forms of transnational solidarity that may emerge as a result.

in the interest of providing a fine-grained, sociohistorically-attuned perspective, A number of educational researchers have recently begun to pay special attention to the significance of transnational connections in the lives and educational trajectories of students in the U.S. and Mexico. In comparing research findings from Nuevo León/Zacatecas, Mexico and Georgia, U.S., Hamann and Zúñiga (2011) conclude that schools in both countries are often ill-prepared to equip children for “persistently transnational” lives (p. 148), resulting in exclusion, marginalization, and challenges to students’ identities. Similarly, González, Griego-Jones, Martínez-Briseño, and Zavala (2012) assert that, even where rhetorics of inclusion are present, schools in the U.S. and Mexico seldom acknowledge the structural inequalities that shape the educational experiences of transnational (Mexican-origin) students, exacerbating the challenges these students face.

More narrowly, Méndez and Staudt (2013) discuss the uniqueness of transnational schooling in borderlands communities – i.e., those that are located in close proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border. They borrow Gloria Anzaldúa’s term *nepantla* – in-betweeness or marginality – to express the cultural and linguistic fluidity that characterizes life in the borderlands and contributes to “complex and contradictory” dynamics in schooling (p. 259). Méndez and Staudt’s (2013) perspective points out some of the difficulties of employing a straightforwardly “bicultural” approach to identity in borderlands schooling.

Bicultural approaches sometimes imply the existence of two discrete cultural or linguistic identities, from which students must choose, and which they (or outsiders) might see as mutually exclusive or incompatible to varying degrees (Byram, 2003, p. 53). It is perhaps more appropriate to consider *transfronterizo* students’ identities in terms of “intercultural possibility” (Hornberger, 2000), proceeding from the recognition that students do not merely switch back and forth (or choose) between identities, but work out distinctive ways of being through “dialogic interaction among different cultural groups” (Hornberger, 2000, p. 190) in the borderlands. Martínez’s (1994) well-known mapping of the many different “sources of cultural and lifestyle orientation” available to border-dwellers is one illustration of this. This approach fits well with perspectives from border theory that emphasize crossings as opportunities to weigh one’s relationships to people and communities on both sides (Rumford, 2014) and, in so doing, to forge one’s own way forward.

Within the growing research on transnationalism in borderlands schooling, a limited number of studies document the experiences of “back-and-forth transnational” (Araujo & de la Piedra, 2013) or *transfronterizo* (de la Piedra & Guerra, 2012; Relaño Pastor, 2007; Zentella, 2012) students, meaning those who go back and forth across the U.S.-Mexico border and spend time in both countries on a regular basis. Promising work in this area explores the implications of the “Janus-faced,” or two-sided nature of the border (cf. Beck & Grande, 2010; Konrad & Nicol, 2011) for identity development; that is, it documents the way that risk and oppression can be intertwined with new possibilities and articulations of identity in border regions. For example, Araujo and de la Piedra (2013) found that elementary school students in El Paso, TX/Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua encountered violence, but also developed resiliency, survival strategies, and the ability to criticize oppression and political failures. In Getrich’s (2013) work with high-school youth in San Diego/Tijuana, the students experienced negative events, such as racialized discrimination and the questioning of their citizenship, during commonplace border-crossings, but also came to see these crossings as possible sites of resistance to state power (p. 476).

Relatively little work to date has focused on the experiences of *transfronterizo* university students. A notable exception is Bejarano (2010), who describes the sense of belonging among college-age youth who grew up in Columbus, NM/Palomas, Chihuahua., but who attend a university outside that area, as a “border rootedness” that allows them to resist their persistent dehumanization at the hands of formal and informal “boundary reinforcers” on return trips to the borderlands. Other researchers have included anecdotes of students’ difficult crossings in the context of broader analyses of power and (il)legality (Dorsey & Díaz-Barriga, 2015), affirming the findings from more in-depth studies of young adults’ *transfronterizo* experiences (e.g., Bejarano, 2010; Getrich, 2013). This study differs from the literature cited above in its specific focus on the effects of changes in students’ cross-border mobility on their identities and relationships with various people, communities, and places. I next review the theoretical frameworks that guide the subsequent discussion: contemporary thinking on borders and mobilities and critical cosmopolitanism.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

This article draws on a number of related frameworks to theorize the emergence of cosmopolitan vision among *transfronterizo* university students. Attending to the distinctive characteristics of cross-border mobility in students’ everyday lives in South Texas/Northern Tamaulipas demands a complex, nuanced understanding of borders and mobility. At the same time, to view students’ stories and experiences in terms of critical cosmopolitanism requires careful engagement with the history of cosmopolitan thinking. Thus, border theory and the new mobilities paradigm are crucial for describing and understanding the nature of students’ cross-border mobility, empirically speaking, while critical cosmopolitanism attempts to capture, in an interpretive sense, the changes in identity and subjectivity that resulted from this mobility.

**Bordering Processes and New Mobilities**

Contemporary border theorists warn against imputing “fixed or unchanging meanings to borders and boundaries” (Rumford, 2014, p. 15) and argue instead for an understanding of “bordering” as a collection of “untidy” and “messy” activities that a wide range of actors carries out throughout society. According to this understanding, borders are not just “lines on a map” but, in fact, are “dispersed a little everywhere, wherever the movement of information, people, and things is happening and is controlled” (Balibar, 2004, p. 1). This is illustrated by the increasing importance of the “internal border” between the U.S. and Mexico: i.e., the system of checkpoints on the U.S. side, located many miles inland from the external border or other ports of entry, which has contributed to the creation of what Dorsey and Díaz-Barriga (2015) call a “Constitution-free zone” in South Texas.

The turn from “borders” to “bordering processes” or “bordering activities” also calls attention to the fact that many people “either work to reinforce state-defining borders or … to subvert them” (Rumford, 2008, pp. 4-5). Rumford (2008, 2014) uses *borderwork* to describe activities, carried out in the course of people’s everyday lives, that have an impact on how the border operates or that transform the meaning of the border. Other scholars have taken issue with the tendency to see borders principally in terms of what they separate, arguing that research on borders should also concern itself with “the range of transborder *connections* and the depth of their influence, meaning, and reach” (Alvarez, 2012, p. 37; my italics). This article seeks to “bridge” this turn in border theory with educational conversations about exploring how the Texas (U.S.)-Tamaulipas (Mex.) border built bridges to new processes of identity formation for university students. Borderwork, in this context, is theorized not just as the work that ordinary people do in reinforcing or subverting the border (Rumford, 2008), but also as the work that borders do for people.

This article engages a theoretical intervention in the social sciences known as the “new mobilities paradigm” (Sheller & Urry, 2006) or mobilities research, an approach that seeks to unsettle understandings of stability and place as “normal,” as opposed to the supposedly aberrant phenomena of change, movement, and placelessness (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 208). Work in this emerging area is attuned to the ways that different kinds of mobility and changes in mobility affect social relations and social action, as well as what mobility means to people (Cresswell, 2010, p. 19).

Rather than just asking how and why people move, mobilities research is interested in how mobility feels (Cresswell, 2010, p. 25) and how people experience “particular … ways of practicing movement” (p. 19). Mobility has the potential to transform people’s relationships with “emplaced configurations” of other people, places, and events and to bring them into contact with new people and places (Conradson & McKay, 2007, p. 167). In this way, “mobility … provides opportunities for new forms of subjectivity and emotion to emerge” (Conradson & McKay, 2007, p. 168), even as it may destabilize people’s sense of self and cultural identity. Understanding mobility also requires us to approach it as a power-laden phenomenon, “a resource that is differentially accessed” (Cresswell, 2010, p. 21). Because of this, we must attend not only to experiences, representations, and meanings of movement, but also to “potential movement and blocked movement, as well as voluntary/temporary immobilities” (Büscher & Urry, 2009, p. 102).

As yet, little educational research has incorporated insights from the new mobilities paradigm. Leander, Phillips, and Taylor (2010) make a nuanced case for taking multiple senses of mobility into account in educational research, though they do not engage directly with the new mobilities paradigm. Some scholars have considered the relevance of mobilities research to issues of advantage, disadvantage, and equity in higher education (Sellar & Gale, 2011) or have used it to argue for more sophisticated understandings of space and place in education (Enriquez, 2011; Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011).

**Critical Cosmopolitanism for Precarious Times**

Cosmopolitanism is [provide substantive definition here]. The concept of cosmopolitanism, often criticized for its universalizing tendencies and colonial genealogy, has proved remarkably resilient. It has proliferated into a bewildering number of cosmopolitanism*s* (Pollock et al., 2002; Robbins, 1993) that challenge the assumptions of the “old” cosmopolitanism. Appiah (2006) acknowledges discomfort with the elitist history of the idea, but also argues that it has merit, in that it captures a fundamental human need to “develop habits of coexistence” (p. xix). This viewpoint runs counter to the assumption that urban elites are the only people who possess cosmopolitanism. Rather, according to the new sense of cosmopolitanism, the uncomfortable “balancing act” (Rabinow, 1986) between local and universal identities is perhaps even more typical of people who were historically excluded from the cosmopolitan imaginary.

Other scholars have contributed to the rethinking of cosmopolitanism as an element of “everyday transnationalism,” envisioned as the kind of cultural competence that comes from people’s “built-up skill in maneuvering” among culturally different people, places, and ideas (Hannerz, 1990, quoted in Vertovec, 2009, p. 70). A critical cosmopolitanism, suggests Rabinow (1986), involves the recognition that actions, utterances, and events with seemingly local scope are, in fact, enmeshed in much wider systems of power relations (see also Mignolo, 2000). Some have proposed deliberately provocative conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism – i.e., the forced or “abject” cosmopolitanism that might result from deportation or other experiences of placelessness (Nyers, 2003). While my participants’ circumstances were not as extreme, my use of “cosmopolitan” is also meant to be eye-catching, as border cities like Brownsville and Matamoros (and their inhabitants) are seldom described in traditionally cosmopolitan terms.

Educational researchers have also begun to engage the potential of cosmopolitanism, though primarily in the area of curriculum and pedagogy (see, e.g., Hull, Stornaiuolo & Sahni, 2010; Vasudevan, 2014; Wahlström, 2014). Sánchez (2007) rejects the elite connotations of “cosmopolitan,” but, in a similar spirit, documents transnational (though not *transfronterizo*)students’ development of global citizenship through the acquisition of both local knowledge and cultural flexibility. My own use of the term “cosmopolitan” in this article arose organically, as I sought a theoretical vocabulary to make sense of emergent themes in the data (see data analysis section and Appendix A for details). Thinking of students’ experiences in terms of cosmopolitanism proved useful because, as Pollock et al. (2002, p. 4) write, the concept allows us to “ground our sense of *mutuality* in conditions of *mutability*” (my italics). Cosmopolitanism can help us to understand people’s interdependence in an ever-changing world where signs, objects, capital, ideas, and people themselves are in motion.

It is essential to note that students’ *transfronterizo* mobility and corresponding development of cosmopolitan identities took place in a precarious environment; here, “precarious” refers to “the visceral awareness of a ‘given’ world suddenly gone” (Clifford, 2012, p. 425) that most of the study participants shared. The valued perspectives I describe as cosmopolitan were hard-won and inextricable, for many students, from feelings of vulnerability and estrangement.

**Methodology**

**Research Setting and Study Design**

The University of Texas at Brownsville (hereafter UTB) was located in the city of Brownsville at the extreme southeastern tip of Texas. (After the time of the study, UTB merged with the University of Texas Pan-American and became the Brownsville campus of the newly created University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, or UTRGV). The campus shares an international border with the Mexican city of Matamoros in the state of Tamaulipas, not far from where the Rio Grande meets the Gulf of Mexico. The Brownsville-Matamoros area has a long history as a site of cultural encounter and conflict between the U.S. and Mexico. In fact, the outbreak of open hostilities between the two countries in the Mexican-American War (1846-48) – the Siege of Fort Texas – took place on what is now the Brownsville campus of UTRGV. Since the establishment of Brownsville after the war, the two cities have existed in close interrelationship and many area residents, including the majority of focal participants in this study, have lived on both sides of the border at various times. While the sociopolitical changes described in the introduction have affected people’s willingness and ability to cross the border, Brownsville and Matamoros are still intimately linked: four international bridges connect the cities, with two of them adjacent to the university. I became interested in UTB students’ cross-border mobility soon after I started teaching in the university’s bilingual teacher preparation program, as a result of informal conversations and class discussions involving *transfronterizo* students. Students’ accounts of how their mobility had changed over time were of particular interest to me, since I had lived and taught elsewhere in the Rio Grande Valley ten years prior to my time at UTB, and had noticed marked differences in the stories I heard in Brownsville.

I conducted participatory qualitative research (Hockey & Forsey, 2012; Kral, 2014), [define participatory qualitative research]. I drew from my perspective as an anthropologist of education with a long-term commitment to South Texas, and relied on close personal relationships with many of the student participants. This study abided by the principles of anthropological inquiry, including “long-term and open-ended commitment, generous attentiveness, relational depth, and sensitivity to context” (Ingold, 2014, p. 384).

Formal data collection consisted of many informal conversations, in and out of class, throughout my time at the university, when students confided in me about the risks, burdens, and advantages of their *transfronterizo* lives, making plain the *cotidianidad* or “everydayness” (Heyman, 1998, p. 166) of border encounters in their experience of higher education. Sharing this sense of the ubiquitous presence of the border in students’ everyday lives, and discussing it with my research collaborators (see below), allowed me to undertake data collection as a “practice of correspondence” (Ingold, 2014, p. 389) with my students, in which my attentiveness to students’ lived social and cultural realities also informed my sense of becoming and belonging as a teacher in South Texas.

As I began to consider conducting research with *transfronterizo* students, I shared the idea with my undergraduate education classes. Based on the generally enthusiastic response, I invited any interested students to collaborate on the project. Two education students, [name] and [name], joined me as undergraduate co-researchers and subsequently assisted in developing the research agenda, writing the project narrative for the Institutional Review Board, creating consent documents and data collection instruments and translating them into Spanish, recruiting potential participants, and even conducting a few interviews. Both undergraduate co-researchers were themselves *transfronterizo* students: at the time of the study, [name] was living in Matamoros and crossing the border to attend classes at UTB, and [name] had moved to the U.S. after high school in order to study at the university. The study thus represents a collaboration between insider student researchers and an insider-outsider teacher-researcher with long experience with the area and student population in question2.

We decided to conduct an online survey to get a general sense of mobility in the *transfronterizo* student population and then to conduct in-depth interviews with a smaller sample of focus participants selected from the survey respondents. We took a network or snowball sampling approach to participant recruitment (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 269). Specifically, we used a reputational strategy (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 240); the undergraduate researchers, as community experts, suggested information-rich cases from their own social networks of *transfronterizo* peers and also identified university classes with large numbers of *transfronterizo* students (including biology, engineering, English, curriculum and instruction, and bilingual education classes), to which they presented the project. The undergraduates also met with UTB’s Office of Global Engagement, which served international students, in order to distribute the call more widely. Finally, as the teacher-researcher, I recruited potential participants from former students in my undergraduate and graduate education courses. Many of the students who chose to participate were students with whom I had already discussed issues of cross-border mobility in class or in personal conversations. (Details on participants are provided in the following section).

The research team collaborated to develop an online survey that participants would be able to complete in fifteen to twenty minutes, including questions about students’ frequency of crossing, reasons for crossing, experiences while crossing, and the benefits and disadvantages of being a *transfronterizo* college student, as well as demographic information (see Appendix B). Content validity was ensured with assistance from a methodologist in the College of Education and the research team piloted the survey before it was made available to the participants. Survey respondents were compensated for their participation by being entered in a raffle for gift cards to a local department store.

Subsequently, we used a maximum variation approach (Patton, 1990) to select focus participants for interviews, aiming for a sample that was representative of a variety of majors and focus areas, ages, undergraduate and graduate students, men and women, and participants who lived or had lived in the U.S. and Mexico. In keeping with the goals and tenets of ethnographic interviewing (Heyl, 2001; Hockey & Forsey, 2012), the quality of existing relationships with participants was also taken into account in selecting potential interviewees. Ethnographic interviews seek to reveal how people make sense of their social and cultural worlds (Spradley, 1979); hence, they are most useful in the context of “respectful, on-going relationships with [the] interviewees” (Heyl, 2001, p. 369). The research team created an interview protocol (see Appendix B) that allowed us to compare responses while allowing the time and openness necessary for participants’ own accounts of their cross-border lives to emerge (Heyl, 2001, p. 369). While we present some of the survey findings below, the interviews provided much more in-depth information on cultural meanings among *transfronterizo* students and are the focus of the analysis in this article.

**Participants and Data Collection**

At the time of data collection (spring-summer 2014), UTB’s reported enrollment was 7,822, including 6,853 undergraduates (87.6% of the student population) and 969 graduate students (12.4%). The university’s demographics were broadly representative of the surrounding area: 90.7% of students were classified as Hispanic, with white, non-Hispanic students comprising the next largest group (6.1%). According to the most recent data available (American FactFinder, 2014), the city of Brownsville has an estimated population of 181,160 people, of whom 93.2% are Hispanic, overwhelmingly of Mexican descent. (Matamoros is a larger and more densely populated city, with 489,193 residents recorded in the 2010 Mexican census). In addition, the university served many so-called “non-traditional” students; average student age was 25.6 years (in a heavily undergraduate student body) and nearly half (45.4%) of students were enrolled part-time. The focal participants in this study were all Hispanic (Mexican/Mexican-American), ranged in age from 18 to 35, and included students who were working while pursuing their degrees. They included students with twelve different majors or areas of specialization at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

According to university demographic data, only 110 students (1.4% of the student population) listed their place of residence as Mexico during the Spring 2014 semester. Data from our study suggest that this figure understates the number of UTB students who lived at least part of the time in Mexico. As the undergraduate researchers and I began to discuss participant recruitment and data collection strategies, we realized that potential participants would fall broadly into three sub-groups (see Table 1). Group One consisted of students who were living in Mexico while attending university in the United States; Group Two consisted of students who had lived and attended school in Mexico in the past, but had since moved to the U.S.; Group Three consisted of students who had lived and attended school primarily in the U.S. throughout their lives, but who nonetheless regularly spent time in Mexico. (Given the porous nature of the Texas-Tamaulipas borderlands, as mentioned, a number of Group Three students had lived in Mexico at one point or another. We included students whose K-12 education had been mostly in the U.S. in Group Three because their experiences were very different from those of Group Two students who had attended Mexican schools more or less exclusively before moving to the U.S. for their university studies).

Some students in Groups One and Two were born in the U.S. and were therefore U.S. citizens, despite having grown up in Mexico; others were Mexican-born and were at UTB on F-1 student visas or had extended their visas through the F-1 Optional Practical Training program. There was a significant population of students with undocumented status at the university. [Name], a former colleague who worked closely with an undocumented student organization at UTB, estimated that at least 300 such students attended UTB at the time of the study, based on current figures from UTRGV’s institutional reporting office (personal communication, 3 June 2016). However, none of the study participants lacked legal permission to be in the U.S., which would have made regular border-crossing impossible. Thus, the participants were privileged, in terms of immigration and citizenship status (for those living in the U.S.) or socioeconomic background (for international students), compared to many other border-dwellers.

Our recruitment efforts (detailed above) yielded a sample that was relatively balanced in terms of the sub-groups: for survey participants, there were 13 respondents from Group One, 16 from Group Two, and 9 from Group Three (for a total of 38 responses). There were six interview participants from Group One, five from Group Two, and five from Group Three (for a total of 16 interviews). The survey and interview protocol were modified to reflect the internal diversity of the sample; for example, Group Two participants (who had previously lived in Mexico) were asked about their reasons for moving to the U.S., but the question did not apply to participants in Groups One and Three.

While it was useful for us to categorize participants in this way, it is important to note that a wide range of experiences existed with education and cross-border mobility within each sub-group. Table 1 presents demographic information for the 16 focal participants and details each person’s changing patterns of cross-border mobility throughout his or her life.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 reveals common trajectories in each of the three sub-groups, in terms of how participants’ mobility changed over time – though, of course, there are exceptions, and individual life trajectories do not always proceed in linear ways. Most of the participants’ lives had become more U.S.-centric due to recent changes in cross-border mobility, whether they were crossing more or less often. In general, Group One participants’ lives had become Brownsville-centric as they started crossing more frequently and spending more time in the U.S., despite continuing to live in Mexico. Many Group Two participants had started commuting to the university from Matamoros but then moved to Brownsville; thus, they were crossing less frequently while also spending more time in the U.S. Group Three participants, by and large, had spent time on both sides of border as children but gradually came to spend more and more time in U.S.; in general, they were crossing less frequently than they had as children or adolescents.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were compiled from survey responses. The interviews, which lasted between twenty-seven and fifty-six minutes, were transcribed in their entirety. Demographic information about focus participants was gathered from interviews and organized for purposes of comparison (see Table 1). Interview transcripts and qualitative survey data were uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software NVivo for Mac (QSR, 2014). Qualitative data were analyzed in NVivo using a rigorous two-cycle process (Saldaña, 2009). The initial coding cycle (Charmaz, 2003) used a simultaneous combination of *in vivo* and descriptive coding methods, yielding a total of 150 discrete codes. Theoretical coding also took place during the first cycle as hierarchical relationships began to emerge (Charmaz, 2003) and yielded 13 higher-level categories and numerous sub-categories. The second cycle then employed a focused coding approach to refine the first-cycle analysis. Focused coding involves “us[ing] initial codes that reappear frequently to sort large amounts of data” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 260), and made it possible to construct the assertions (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) that are the basis of the two findings sections. Appendix A provides further details of how relationships among first-cycle codes were refined and reorganized as a result of this process.

I found the coding procedures and my existing cultural knowledge of the setting to be complementary: coding in NVivo was useful for organizing the data, being consistent in searching for robust themes across participants, keeping track of the codebook to facilitate recoding, and exploring hierarchical relationships among codes (see Appendix A for examples). At the same time, doing participatory qualitative research in a setting and with people I knew helped to ensure the validity of the codes that emerged inductively from analysis. While I tried to take an unbiased and consistent approach to coding, and found NVivo useful in doing so, the findings did not emerge from naïve engagement with the data, but depended crucially on my positioning in the world of borderlands schooling I describe.

In fact, a number of qualitative researchers identify validity procedures that closely resemble the principles of anthropological inquiry that undergird this study. My approach to data analysis fits most closely with what Cresswell and Miller (2000) call the constructivist or interpretive paradigm, according to which perspectives on reality are taken to be “pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended, and contextualized” (p. 125). Validity procedures recommended for constructivist researchers include collecting richly descriptive data, undergoing prolonged engagement in the field, and searching for disconfirming evidence (Cresswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126; see also Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 40, Maxwell, 1996). The data elicited were inarguably rich, including many lengthy narratives of schooling and cultural practice on both sides of the border, and the study came out of my long-term immersion in South Texas, as previously established. Recoding interview and qualitative survey data as new themes and codes emerged throughout the first cycle allowed me to search for disconfirming evidence and to confront seeming contradictions in the data (for example, to balance the voices of students who felt fearful in Mexico with the voices of those who did not, and to consider the implications for the discussion of cosmopolitan vision; see the second findings section for details).

To provide greater rigor, data analysis also incorporated procedures recommended for more systematic qualitative studies (Cresswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126), including triangulation and member checks. Qualitative survey responses were analyzed alongside the interview data and were used as an additional source of evidence for themes that emerged strongly from the interviews (e.g., the fact that disadvantages and benefits of cross-border student life often went hand-in-hand). Q and statistics from the university’s institutional reporting office were subsequently used to augment the qualitative findings, where appropriate (e.g., to characterize experiences of fear and violence among the study participants as a whole, or to put students’ *transfronterizo* stories in the context of the university’s recorded international student population). That being said, t Finally, while it proved difficult to reestablish contact with the focus participants (many of whom had graduated by the time of writing), two graciously agreed to review and comment on the findings. The students with whom I conducted member checks enthusiastically affirmed that the findings reflected their *transfronterizo* experiences, calling them “full of truths that I didn't even know were there all along,” “strikingly true,” and “eye opening.”

**Findings**

Findings from the study are organized into two sections: (1) the effects of *transfronterizo* mobility on academic identity and academic practice and (2) broader transformations in participants’ subjectivities that came about as a result of their persistently transnational lives. In both sets of findings, somewhat paradoxically, the apparent drawbacks of *transfronterizo* mobility are seen to be inextricable from its unique benefits. In academic terms, crossing the border presented logistical challenges, but also offered students the chance to develop distinctive academic identities associated with success, hard work, responsibility, and gratitude. In wider social terms, students connected their vulnerability as border-crossers with a cosmopolitan understanding of the borderlands that they prized and contrasted with outsiders’ misunderstandings of the area.

***“Como Que No Se Esfuerzan Tanto”/*“It’s Like They Don’t Make as Much of an Effort”: *Transfronterizo* Lives and Academic Identities**

A number of related themes had to do with the effects of cross-border mobility on Mexico-based students’ academic identities and everyday academic practice. Navigating the border on a regular basis, however, was not just a matter of mobility, but – recalling insights from new mobilities research – could also entail waiting to move, not being able to move, or reorganizing one’s life in order to move (Büscher & Urry, 2009). Participants who resided on both sides of the border connected temporary immobility – e.g., waiting in line for an unknown amount of time at the bridge – to an identity that was conducive to academic success. This might seem surprising, since students who lived or had lived in Mexico complained about the exhausting schedule of waking up early to make sure they got to class or work on time. They also bemoaned the difficulty of fitting border crossings into their already busy schedules and the stress of not knowing how long it would take to cross. Said Ana, who had lived on both sides of the border at different times during her university education:

*Porque por lo regular … Es decir, cuando vivía en México, tenía que levantarme yo creo que unas dos horas antes de mi clase. A veces había mucha fila. Si tenía clases en la mañana era difícil porque si tenía exámenes podía no llegar o- sí, o sea, nunca sabía.*

Because usually … I mean, when I lived in Mexico, I had to get up I think like two hours before my class. Sometimes there was a long line. If I had classes in the morning it was hard because if I had exams maybe I wouldn’t get there in time or- yeah, or like, I never knew. (May 24, 2014)

Even getting to the border was an ordeal for some students. A student named Cristina, who lived in the U.S., described her boyfriend’s (a fellow UTB student) herculean efforts to get from his house in Matamoros to the border through a combination of *peceras* (old school buses converted into low-cost shuttles) and his bicycle. She then reflected on the level of energy and commitment required for *transfronterizo* students to succeed academically and simply to manage their everyday lives across the border – that is, the material work that went into making mobility happen, and made the more profound forms of borderwork possible (Rumford, 2008):

I’ve talked to a lot of people, and they all say it’s like- it’s a lot of work (laughing). So, aside from all the things that you’re doing, and it’s hard work already, and then you actually have to think, “Okay, I gotta get really- get up really early in the morning so that I can actually be to my class on time,” or work, or whatever it is. And, you know … it’s everything, it’s not just school. (9 July 2014)

Despite all this, a student named Sara commented – in a sentiment many of the participants shared – that *transfronterizo* students appeared to be more academically successful than their U.S.-bound counterparts: *“Bueno, al menos yo sí veo eso, que las personas que- bueno, que vienen de Matamoros, que van y vienen, les va mejor en la escuela.”* (“Well, at least I do see that, that the people who- well, who come from Matamoros, who come and go, do better in school”). Similarly, a U.S.-based student named Pablo marveled at his Mexican friends who “would go the extra mile” at UTB, asking me if I’d noticed this phenomenon as a teacher. Participants consistently credited the hassle of having to manage regular border crossings with significant academic benefits. In the first place, students living on both sides remarked that this situation forced one to be more organized and responsible:

Leaving home at six-thirty and, you know, wake up at like around five-thirty, get ready and stuff, and then- come. So, it’s- it’s a matter of being organized and responsible. That’s what … helped me, to come- crossing every day. (Aracely, 21 May 2014)

Some students even turned temporary immobility to their advantage – for example, by using otherwise wasted time on the bridge to catch up on sleep or to complete assignments:

The line gets so big … It’s like, what can you do? Just sleep. That’s the only thing you can do. Just sleep. Or sometimes- a lot of the times- well, most of the times I would do homework. Like … I can do it in the bridge and I would do homework in the bridge and then finish it. A lot of people do that, believe it or not. (Yu, 5 June 2014)

Implicit in Yu’s and Aracely’s accounts is a sense that the everyday experience of cross-border mobility actually set them apart from UTB students who did not have to deal with the border as often as they did; for one, they had to exercise creativity to make the most of temporary immobility, in order to live up to their academic and social commitments. Moreover, daily life *felt* different for *transfronterizo* students, at least for those who crossed to go to class: this specific experience of mobility was typified by a set of sensations (e.g., fatigue, boredom, frustration, uncertainty) that demanded a particular set of responses and a particular form of resilience (Cresswell, 2010).

Notwithstanding the perceived academic advantages of crossing the border to attend UTB, the difficulties associated with this form of mobility – namely, the exhaustion that resulted from waking up early and arriving home late, the hassle of wasting time on the bridge, occasional harassment by U.S. authorities (of which some students complained), and the uncertainty of knowing how long crossing would take – resulted in some Mexico-based students’ deciding to move to the U.S., often taking their siblings or parents along. A student named Lucy described the circumstances that led to her decision this way: “Oh my God, [having to cross] was a nightmare! Sometimes it’ll be like one hour, sometimes five minutes. So, I wouldn’t know … So, I was thinking, like, ‘This is not gonna work’” (9 June 2014). Even for students whose families remained in Mexico, life could “[change] completely,” as a student named Alex expressed, to the point that Brownsville and Matamoros “became like one city”:

*Y el hecho de que cuando yo me vine para acá, nuestra vida cambió completamente. Ahora ya nuestra vida no era solo [Matamoros] porque ya todos comenzamos a venir más tiempo, más frecuencia. Comenzamos a- No sé, la vida ya ahora se hizo Matamoros-Brownsville completamente. Se hizo como una ciudad para nosotros.*

And the thing is that when I came over here, our life changed completely. Now our life wasn’t just [Matamoros] because we all already started coming more often, spending more time. We started- I don’t know, life now became completely Matamoros-Brownsville. It became like one city for us. (July 8, 2014)

Alex and Lucy framed these life changes as relatively unproblematic. However, some participants (living on both sides) worried that far-reaching cultural changes would result from the disruptions to family life that changes in cross-border mobility produced.

Qualitative data from the survey bear out the pattern from the interviews. When asked about the main *disadvantages* of crossing the border for educational reasons, students responded in by-now familiar terms: *“levantarte más temprano”* (“having to get up earlier”), “too much hassle to get in,” *“largas filas en el puente”* (“long lines on the bridge”), *“perder tiempo y dinero en fila del puente”* (“wasting time and money in line at the bridge”), “the amount of time it takes to get to school,” and so on. However, participants’ responses to a question about the main *advantages* of being a *transfronterizo* student reflected the tight connection between the trials of border-crossing and the academic benefits of doing so. Sometimes, participants referred to this connection in a merely practical sense – e.g., *“a veces puedes llegar muy temprano y adelantar tu tarea”* (“sometimes you can arrive very early and get a head start on your work”). Other responses, however, suggested that longer-lasting changes to students’ identities were taking place as a result of their persistently transnational lives: *“El cruzar la frontera es una responsabilidad extra que te hace valorar más cada clase de UTB”* (“Crossing the border is an extra responsibility that makes you value each class at UTB more”); *“Puedes llegar a ser una persona más responsable, disciplinada y trabajadora”* (“You can become a more responsible, disciplined, and hard-working person”).

That is, it was not the case that experiences of mobility merely reorganized participants’ academic *practices.* Rather, changes in mobility actually affected participants’ *subjectivities* as these changes transformed students’ relationships to other people and places in the borderlands (cf. Conradson & McKay, 2007). Crossing a border is an opportunity for people to reassess their relationships with other people and places (Rumford, 2014). This was emphatically the case for *transfronterizo* students in Brownsville-Matamoros: students’ often fraught, embodied experiences of cross-border mobility allowed them to reassess the kinds of people they were. At the same time, these experiences gave them opportunities to reassess how they were positioned relative to other UTB students and other border-dwellers.

In particular, the widely voiced belief that having to cross the border made one appreciate education more (and made one more responsible, hardworking, and so on) sometimes gave way to a discourse about the supposed deficits of U.S.-based students at UTB. Some participants joked about this. Aracely, for example, said that she could not understand how students living on campus or nearby could arrive late for class when she had gotten up hours earlier in Matamoros to arrive on time. Other participants spoke more seriously about what they saw as a lack of dedication and a sense of ingratitude among U.S.-based peers:

*Lo que veo mucho que pasa aquí es como que las personas no toman mucho en cuenta la ayuda que se les da, o muchos se quejan mucho. Como que no se esfuerzan tanto, o como que toman las cosas muy a la ligera. Eso sí lo vi mucho, yo creo, durante todo el tiempo que estuve aquí en la universidad.*

What I see a lot that happens here is like the people don’t really appreciate the help that they give them, or many of them complain a lot. It’s like they don’t make as much of an effort or like they take things very lightly. I really saw that a lot, I think, during the whole time that I was here at the university. (Ana, 24 May 2014)

In a more nuanced commentary, Sara said that she felt differently from her U.S.-based counterparts *“porque pues tienes otro como* background*, se podría decir”* (“because, well, you have like a different background, you could say”) and because she did not speak English as well. However, she also acknowledged that there were many similarities among students on both sides, especially in light of the fact that many U.S.-based students had lived in Matamoros as children (and, I would add, that there was a wide range of proficiency in Spanish and English even among U.S.-based students). Still, she said of U.S.-based students, *“Pues creo que también lo mismo, de que muchas personas … no echan muchas ganas a la escuela o no lo quieren aprovechar y eso”* (“Well, I think that it’s also the same thing, that a lot of people … don’t make a big effort at school or don’t want to take advantage of it”) (June 5, 2014). While participants did not address this issue directly, it is difficult to avoid the social class undertones of the unfavorable discursive contrast between hardworking, responsible, and relatively well-off students from Mexico and students who had grown up in a socioeconomically depressed area of the U.S.

However, certain of the U.S.-based (Group Three) participants also expressed that cross-border mobility had affected their academic identities in different ways. These participants also said that mobility had caused them to reassess their relationships – not so much to other people, as in the comments just preceding, but to the university and their roles within it. Echoing, to some extent, the theme that *transfronterizo* students appreciated education more, these participants also affirmed that their borderwork had influenced their subjectivities. In response to a question about whether or not going back and forth had affected her academic experience at UTB, Mary replied:

Well, yeah, because I feel bad like for the people that can’t study or that can’t have like the peace that I have here … It makes me like, oh, appreciate my education here instead of- *“Pobrecitos* (poor things) … Like they wanna go to school, they can’t” … But there’s a lot of people that are like that and … When I came back to school, I was like, “No.” Like *hay gente que quiere ir, no puede* (there are people that want to go, they can’t) and I’m over here like just dumping my education out, like just- I’m not even caring about it. (27 June 2014)

As discussed in the introduction, for Mary, “coming back to school” coincided with resuming regular border-crossing. Here, she contrasts an earlier version of herself who was “over here [i.e., in the U.S.] just dumping my education out” with a newer self, who “appreciate[s] [her] education here,” having been transformed by recent experiences in Mexico. Another U.S.-based student, Araís, reflected on her visit to a university in Matamoros, where her cousin had invited her to attend an anatomy class. Araís asserted that this experience had transformed her academic subjectivity in a different respect: it was not that she encountered deprivation in Mexico and came to appreciate her education more (like Mary). Rather, in witnessing the degree of student involvement and activity at the Mexican university, she was inspired to a new sense of what might be possible at UTB:

*Entonces te das cuenta de que, o sea- teniendo la oportunidad de yo ver eso, me hace, por ejemplo, aquí, a ser más activa en la universidad* …

(And so you realize that, like- me having the opportunity to see that, it makes me, for example, here, be more active in the university) … I mean, like for me it looked good, and maybe we can do that here, especially ’cause we have more resources, you know.

(June 27, 2014)

Thus, participants’ borderwork (Rumford, 2008) – their continuous (re)negotiation of the challenges the border posed and the lines of difference it made visible –built bridges to new articulations of academic identity (cf. Alvarez, 2012). At times, this process took place at the expense of students from the U.S., who could be positioned as less resilient or successful than students from Mexico who crossed on a daily basis. At other times, however, students from both sides spoke powerfully of the relevance of particular forms and experiences of mobility (Cresswell, 2010), such as recently resumed mobility and temporary immobility (Büscher & Urry, 2009), to their academic lives and trajectories. I have argued that this process allowed participants to reassess their relationships to other people and places (Rumford, 2014). Participants’ awareness of the privileged nature of cross-border mobility, as “a resource that is differentially accessed” (Cresswell, 2010, p. 21), was in tension with their sense that *transfronterizo* students tended to be uniquely resourceful, responsible, and appreciative of education. Some students also affirmed that regular crossing allowed them to see academic possibilities and develop academic identities that they would not have been able to imagine otherwise. In the second findings section, I move from a specific focus on the academic effects of *transfronterizo* mobility to a broader consideration of how study participants came to embody a cosmopolitan vision of the borderlands.

**“Actually Knowing What’s Going On”: Cross-Border Mobility and Cosmopolitan Vision**

As was established in the previous section, cross-border mobility had a significant influence on participants’ academic identities and practices; moreover, the effects of mobility were different for students from the different subgroups. More broadly, however, students from all subgroups valued their *transfronterizo* lives and experiences not just for narrowly academic reasons, but because cross-border mobility gave them what they consistently referred to as a more expansive, better-informed perspective on the world. many participants

For example, the student mentioned in the introduction,, her response nicely summed up the seeming paradox that is at the heart of the findings:

27,

Mary affirmed that feelings of vulnerability and an expansive sense of cosmopolitan understanding were not mutually exclusive. Being “scared” did not diminish what she saw as the real value of crossing the border: “knowing what’s going on” in both countries, instead of being “close-minded” or relying on others’ accounts, made her “more aware” in a way that her friend was not.

Another representative statement, from which this article takes its title, came from Sara, an outspoken undergraduate who was intensely interested in business, economic development, and civil society in Mexico and the U.S. She used her own position as a *transfronterizo* student to criticize what she saw as the comparatively ill-informed and naïve viewpoints of peers in her business classes who lacked her direct experience in both countries. In contrast, Sara commented, she had “more insight” into the complexity of social and political problems. I quote her narrative in full in order to give a sense of how Sara saw herself in relation to her classmates and sociopolitical realities on both sides of the border:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Vuelvo a lo mismo, en cuanto a* business, *creo que las personas que no cruzan a Matamoros o que no cruzan a México, a veces no entienden que no en todo el mundo es igual. Y, por decir, nosotros hablamos como de* free market *y democracia y esos temas, y ellos creen que en todo el mundo es igual, y no es cierto. Entonces- o sea, bueno, yo que he visto un lugar donde supuestamente hay democracia y no es cierto, entonces- y un sistema que es diferente, creo que por eso tienes- puedes opinar más. Conoces como dos versiones, y creo que te da como más visión, pienso yo. Y también … hay personas que nunca, no cruzan a Matamoros y creen que solucionar los problemas de violencia es muy sencillo … Bueno, una vez en clase un compañero dijo que deberían de dejar que todas las personas tuvieran un arma en su casa para poder defenderse … ¡Ay! no quiero ser grosera pero pensé que era lo más tonto … O sea, en lo personal, yo pienso que no puedes solucionarlo con más violencia, y no se trata de que le hagas daño a otra persona porque después le pueden hacer algo también a tu familia. Entonces, creo que ellos no alcanzan a entender que no se puede acabar eso tan pronto, y que no alcanzan, también, a comprender que han tenido muchas oportunidades de vivir en un lugar donde no corres peligro … Bueno, yo creo que es más fácil encontrar trabajo aquí … Tienes más derechos. Y creo que ellos no- Creo que, la verdad, no lo valoran.* | I keep coming back to the same thing, in terms of business, I think that people who don’t cross to Matamoros or who don’t cross to Mexico, sometimes they don’t understand that it’s not the same all over the world. And, for example, we talk about “free market” and democracy and those things, and they think it’s the same everywhere, and it’s not true. I, who have seen a place where supposedly there’s democracy and it’s not true, so- and a system that’s different, I think because of that you have- you can have [a better-informed] opinion. You know like two versions, and I think it gives you like more insight, I think. And also … there are people who never, who don’t cross to Matamoros and think that solving the problems of violence is really simple … So, one time in class a classmate said that they should let everybody have a gun in their house to be able to defend themselves … Ay, I don’t want to be rude, but I thought that it was the stupidest thing … Or like, personally, I think that you can’t solve it with more violence, and they don’t get into the fact that if you harm somebody else afterwards they can also do something to your own family. So, I don’t think they realize that it can’t be stopped so quickly, and they don’t realize either that they’ve had a lot of opportunities living in this place where you aren’t in danger … Well, I think it’s easier to find work here … You have more rights. And I think they don’t- truthfully, I think they don’t value it. |

(June 5, 2014)

In this excerpt, rather than representing her experiences as marginal, Sara claims that her *transfronterizo* identity gives her special insight because it allows her to “know … two versions” of events. She frankly acknowledges the “underbelly” (Alvarez, 2012, p. 31) of life on both sides of the border, referring to violence, political corruption, and economic struggles in Mexico and to judgmental attitudes and an unrealistic view of social problems in the U.S. At the same time, Sara suggests that her *transfronterizo* standpoint informs her understanding of developments in both countries, such as the implications of escalating violence for everyday life and the socioeconomic differences between paying lip service to free markets and democracy and having a closer approximation of such a system. Furthermore, this standpoint shapes her participation in higher education, framing her remarks as a commentary on the “stupidity,” of solving violence with more violence, as her (presumably American) classmate had recommended.

A critical cosmopolitan attitude was evident in the participants’ responses to danger and violence in their daily lives or their families’ lives. However, this issue must be approached very carefully: on the one hand, increased violence in northern Mexico in the recent past profoundly impacted some students’ lives and educational experiences (see the Introduction). Students who spent their childhoods moving rather seamlessly between the U.S. and Mexico now had to grapple with a newly precarious borderland. According to the survey data, 57% of participants had personally experienced violence in Mexico or near the border, and 89% said that someone they knew had experienced violence (n = 35). Numerous participants shared narratives of violence, including being caught in *balaceras* (shootouts), encountering road blockades, and dealing with the kidnapping of extended family members. Some students originally intended to study at Mexican universities but decided to come to UTB partly out of concern for their own and/or their families’ safety. Many participants spoke movingly of the fear they dealt with on a regular basis in navigating the transformed landscape of the borderlands. The real impact of violence on students’ lives was unavoidable in the context of conversations about cross-border mobility.

On the other hand, when students brought up issues of risk, danger, and violence, they were often most concerned with what they saw as distorted or sensationalized views of Matamoros and Mexico that, they said, originated with biased media coverage or with outsiders who lacked intimate knowledge of the students’ *transfronterizo* worlds. Narratives about the riskiness of life in Matamoros or Mexico could become an opportunity for students to display their cosmopolitan immunity from the exaggeration or hyperbole that, some claimed, was typical of outsider discourses about the area. For example, Araís, a thoughtful, friendly student who usually spoke in rapid-fire TexMex (the local hybrid variety of English and Spanish), raised the case of Paloma Noyola Bueno, a middle-school student from Matamoros who had recently attracted media attention after scoring first on a national math test. Araís said that she and her cousins, who lived in Matamoros, had reacted with mocking disbelief to an online news article from a U.S. publication about how Paloma had “succeeded in the middle of *cartel* wars,” as Araís revoiced the authors:

And then my cousins and me, we’re like, *“¡Ay no!”* like *“no manches” y que no sé qué.* *“Nomás le quieren hacer- no está tan feo,” y que no sé qué. “Por eso nadie viene y* blah blah blah” …

. “They’re just trying to- it’s not that bad” and whatever. “That’s why nobody comes [to Matamoros]”) … But you see, like, we read it and then somebody else is gonna read it from like Minnesota from Canada whatever … and they’re gonna be like, “Oh my God, look, it's really bad.” … And the- the article kept going and kept going, and we’re like, *“Ay no. Ya. Ya. Ya le exageraron bastante” y que mucha crema en los tacos y que no sé qué.*

(“Ay no. Enough. Enough. They’ve already exaggerated enough” and that they’re putting a lot of cream on the tacos and whatever.) (June 27, 2014)

In this excerpt, Araís shows an acute awareness of the pitfalls of recirculating stereotypical discourse about Matamoros and Mexico as inherently dangerous places. She explicitly contrasts her and her cousins’ firsthand understanding of the situation with sensationalistic media coverage – as she memorably puts it, overloading the tacos with cream – and its potential effects on faraway readers in Minnesota or Canada,3 hinting at the social and economic repercussions if “nobody comes [to Matamoros anymore].” Likewise, Alex, for whose family Matamoros and Brownsville had “become like one city,” criticized what he saw as irrational fears, stemming from media discourse and local “talk,” that discouraged people from crossing the border:

*He escuchado a mucha gente … he escuchado, “Que no voy porque equis situación.” Pero a veces siento que exageran. Los medios exageran, la gente exagera, las pláticas se exageran, entonces tienen una idea equívoca de lo que realmente hay en Matamoros. Y sí, tienen mucho miedo, he visto … O sea- digo, uno va muchas veces a la semana. Mis padres viven allá y entonces- y no ha sucedido nada malo.*

I’ve heard a lot of people … “I don’t go because of such-and-such a situation.” But sometimes I feel that they exaggerate. The media exaggerates, people exaggerate, talk exaggerates, so they have a mistaken idea of what there really is in Matamoros. And yeah, they’re really afraid, I’ve seen … But like I said, people go many times per week. My parents live there and- nothing bad has happened. (8 July 2014)

Alex used a specific discursive strategy, relatively common in the interviews, to counter media “exaggeration” about the troubles in Mexico: “My parents live there and nothing bad has happened” and similar statements were used both as counterexamples to prevailing stereotypes about life in Matamoros and, again, to contrast firsthand experience with rapidly proliferating “talk.” Interestingly, other participants made the opposite observation about media coverage, mostly in reference to Mexican media: i.e., that newspapers, television stations, and so on could not be trusted because they were under political or criminal pressure to downplay the seriousness of the violence. Participants generally mentioned this, however, in order to make a similar underlying point: that it was impossible to know what was actually going on without personal knowledge of the situation, since media representations (whether originating in the U.S. and Mexico) were invariably biased, though in different directions.

Other participants also affirmed the value of firsthand knowledge of life on both sides, even at the cost of fearing violence or coming face to face with poverty and hardship. Mary described the difference between herself, a *transfronterizo* student, and students who only spent time in the U.S. this way:

Knowing everything that goes on over there, I just think that’s something … I feel like since I actually go and like my grandma tells me of my cousins or whatever goes on with them, I feel like that … I just actually know what’s going on. (June 27, 2014)

Ana, who, unlike Mary, lived in Mexico during her university years, spoke of this contrast in much the same way:

*Como que no cruzan, igual, y nada más por lo que escuchan, de que se dan una idea de cómo es la situación en México o cómo es estar viviendo en México. Pero una idea muy clara, pues no, no creo.*

Since they don’t cross, and just from what they hear they get an idea of how the situation is in Mexico or what it’s like to be living in Mexico. But a very clear idea, well, no, I don’t think [they have one]. (24 May 2014)

*Transfronterizo* students, therefore, laid claim to a cosmopolitan understanding, built up through everyday experience, that allowed them to “actually know what [was] going on.” However, this understanding, as Rabinow (1986, p. 258) says of critical cosmopolitanism, was “suspicious of its own imperial tendencies.” Even as they asserted the superiority of their knowledge, in contrast to others’ distorted views, the border cosmopolitans in this study were keenly aware of the limitations of their *own* perspectives. Given the students’ long experience of “knowing two versions” of border stories, they were apt to see things from multiple sides, which sometimes led them to question their beliefs and conclusions.

For example, Araís confessed that, in the midst of making fun of the hyperbolic article about Paloma Noyola, she suddenly experienced a moment of disjuncture from her cousins. She maintained that the article had blown the situation in Matamoros out of proportion, but also reflected on the possibility that her cousins had become desensitized to the ongoing violence:

And then me and my cousins were reading, like, “Oh my God this is not even true” this and that. But as I thought about it, I’m like, “*Pues* (Well) it’s kind of true but you [i.e., her cousins] just don’t see it ’cause you're used to it.” (June 27, 2014)

Araís refrained from joining in her cousins’ mockery, struggling to find a middle ground between the voice of normalized violence (her cousins) and the voice of mediatized hysteria in the article. Even Alex, who was unstinting in his criticism of outsiders’ “mistaken ideas” of life in Matamoros, mused that he had perhaps equally unfounded fears of other border cities, and toyed with the same possibility that Araís raised: Was his perspective a truer one, or was it just the result of becoming desensitized?

*Quizá es malo sentirse seguro. No lo sé porque, digo, en Matamoros, yo digo, no, pues no pasa nada. Pero bueno, también pienso, “Bueno, ¿y qué tal si en Ciudad Juárez?” Si me dices, “¿Vienes a Ciudad Juárez?”, bueno, no voy … O sea, puedo pensar igual pero hay gente de Ciudad Juárez que decir, “Sí, no pasa nada.” Entonces, quizá es malo que estemos acostumbrados a ver cosas, a que pasen cosas, pero es como es, así es.*

Maybe it’s bad to feel safe. I don’t know because, I mean, in Matamoros, I say, no, nothing’s gonna happen. But then I also think, “Ok, so what about Ciudad Juárez?” If you ask me, “Are you coming to Ciudad Juárez?”, well, I won’t go … I can think about it that way but there are people in Ciudad Juárez to say, “Sure, nothing’s gonna happen.” So maybe it’s bad that we’ve gotten used to seeing things, that things happen, but that’s the way it is. (July 8, 2014)

To some degree, many *transfronterizo* students shared this self-questioning attitude, which is indicative of what I have called their balancing act, or their struggle to find their way among competing representations of the borderlands during a time of sociopolitical upheaval.

However, the power of “knowing two versions” was not limited to questions of risk and safety in daily life. Participants also professed that their intercultural understanding had been enriched as a result of their cross-border mobility. For example, in comments that recall other participants’ denunciations of “distortions” and “exaggerations” in stories about Matamoros/Mexico, Yu shared his experiences of cultural bias on both sides. Yu, who lived in Matamoros, used this example as an opportunity to reflect on the “blessing” of being a *transfronterizo* student, which allowed him to address “wrong perceptions” directly:

A lot of people in Mexico, I noticed that they really judge Americans. It’s like, “Oh, they always have the money. They always judge us. They look at us like we are less” … Well, in my family, some of them are like angry … And over here [in the U.S.], I kind of see people, you know, go like, “Hey, they’re dumb. They don’t know anything” … They have the wrong perceptions of each other … And I really feel blessed to be crossing the border because I can actually tell people like, “Hey, I experienced this. Well, it’s not the way you see it.” (June 5, 2014)

Unlike the figures of embittered Mexicans or entitled Americans he conjures up, Yu’s knowledge of both countries, built up through regular crossing and educational experiences throughout his life (see Table 1), gives him a cosmopolitan vision that is not veiled by the reflexive judgments that afflict others, as he tells it.

Additionally, some participants attributed their intercultural competence not merely to spending time on both sides of the border, but to the nature of their cross-border mobility *as students.* “Knowing two versions,” in this sense, led students to develop subjectivities that were grounded in intercultural understanding, as they imagined how their educational experiences compared to those of students who were positioned differently with respect to the border. Crossing the border, whether to attend classes or to maintain ties with family, was an opportunity for students to reassess their relationships with their UTB peers (cf. Rumford, 2014), and, at the same time, to imagine their own identities and futures in terms of the intercultural possibility (Hornberger, 2000) such crossings afforded. Angela, a doctoral student who lived and taught in Matamoros, summed it up beautifully:

*Entonces eso nos hace también diferentes porque mucha gente aquí y que vive y que siempre ha estudiado aquí, habla español pero lo habla mal. Igual que nosotros que venimos para acá y hablamos inglés y lo hablamos mal. Entonces, es como un estar aprendiendo de todos, de allá para acá y de aquí también. Es como estar aprendiendo en ambas partes, en ambos sentidos para poder- pues no sé, caminar … por el mismo camino.*

So that makes us different too because a lot of people here, who live and have always studied here, speak Spanish but speak it badly. Just like those of us who come here and speak English and speak it badly. So, it’s like a learning experience for everyone, from over there to here and here as well. It’s like we’re learning on both sides, in both senses to be able to- well, I don’t know, to walk … the same road. (June 5, 2014)

For Angela, the experience of having to navigate higher education in her second language led to deeper reflection on the ways students on both sides might resemble each other and a vision of borderlands education as a multidirectional learning process for everyone involved. “Actually knowing what’s going on,” in Angela’s account, was not so much about exposing “wrong perceptions” for what they were, but of coming to appreciate others’ experiences in a new way – i.e., through one’s own experience of education in a transborder world. Confronting the practical difficulties of *transfronterizo* student life – e.g., challenges with academic English – also allowed students like Angela to reflect on the distinctive strengths that they developed through their everyday cross-border “maneuvering” (cf. Hannerz, 1990, quoted in Vertovec, 2009, p. 70), such as (perhaps) a greater potential for intercultural understanding.

In similar terms, Mary expressed her appreciation of students who were previously educated in Mexico and had to function in the U.S. educational system, alongside her hope that someone else might recognize her (Mary’s) intercultural competence, forged through years of *transfronterizo* activity:

And I was like- ah, and then she [a student from Mexico] learned English. Like, “Wow, that’s awesome. That's great.” Like I think how I see them, maybe somebody will see me like, “Oh, okay. She lived there for a little- for a little while but then she came over here. Cool!”

(27 June 2014)

Thus, for the students in this study, cosmopolitanism was not just a matter of thinking “beyond the local” (Pollock et al., 2002, p. 10) but also took the form of “inhabiting multiple places at once” and even “being different beings simultaneously” (p. 11). “Knowing two versions” of border stories, in the multiple senses discussed, allowed *transfronterizo* students to inhabit multiple perspectives, view border events nearly simultaneously from different angles, and put themselves in others’ places. This critical cosmopolitan vision presents a sharp rebuke to the idea that borderlands schooling is best understood as a site of marginality because …?.

**Implications**

In this article, I have asserted that borders, somewhat paradoxically, build bridges (Alvarez, 2012) to new articulations of identity for *transfronterizo* university students. Students’ everyday transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009) reshaped their academic subjectivities and led them to develop a critical cosmopolitan perspective on the people and places around them. As Rumford (2014) contends, border crossings, while fraught with tension, can “creat[e] cosmopolitan opportunities through the possibility of cultural encounters and negotiations of difference” (p. 3). Students’ borderwork (Rumford, 2008) – their day-in, day-out engagement with, and maneuvering around, the border – was central to the way they experienced higher education. The participants’ borderwork extended to their efforts to “speak back” to others’ misunderstandings of the borderlands, or misapprehensions of border dwellers, as they continuously reassessed their relations with the various communities around them (Rumford, 2014). *Transfronterizo* students laid claim to cosmopolitan vision, a form of insight or intercultural competence arising from their cross-border mobility and their corresponding ability to embrace multiple versions of events.

As Pollock et al. (2002) observe of “new” cosmopolitanisms in general, this vision was grounded, for many of the participants, in a “sense of mutuality” as educational subjects shaped and propelled by similar forces within the mutable sociopolitical context of the borderlands. Some participants saw themselves (or Mexico-based classmates) as academically superior to their non-*transfronterizo* counterparts at UTB because of the benefits of everyday crossing. For both U.S.- and Mexico-based students, awareness of the sacrifices that were necessary to pursue higher education across the border led them to put special emphasis on back-and-forth transnational students’ responsibility, discipline, and academic seriousness. Other participants, however, acknowledged that the students were all learning from each other as they endeavored “to walk the same road” in precarious times.

In emphasizing the productive nature of students’ borderwork, I have also tried to acknowledge that bridges do “span … the underbelly” (Alvarez, 2012, p. 31) and not to ignore the hassles and vulnerabilities that were associated with *transfronterizo* life for many students. Attempting to pull off this scholarly balancing act has made me admire the students’ cosmopolitan balancing act (Rabinow, 1986) all the more. It has been challenging – as a researcher and, I hope, as a trusted ally of the participants – to leave the risks and dangers of students’ *transfronterizo* worlds “in the picture” without pathologizing a region that is too often described only in terms of brokenness, illegality, and violence. The participants were largely dismissive of such depictions, even as they owned up to moments of “panic” or admitted that they were of two minds on the subject. They did not minimize the difficulties of negotiating the border as university students, but also spoke appreciatively of its positive influence on their education. They consistently underscored the value of “actually knowing what’s going on,” in explicit contrast to those supposedly mired in hearsay and “wrong perceptions.” This is, perhaps, another sense in which students’ informed their cosmopolitanism – i.e., their recognition that the unique benefits of cross-border mobility could not be easily disentangled from its significant drawbacks. It also aligns with others’ findings (Araujo & de la Piedra, 2013; Bejarano, 2010; Getrich, 2013) that less-desirable aspects of back-and-forth transnationalism can result in students’ developing resilience as well as critical awareness of their social worlds.

The findings from this study make a strong case for paying closer attention to the critical cosmopolitan voices of students from so-called marginal areas, like the U.S.-Mexico borderlands because …?. Additionally, they point to the fact that researchers have much to learn from the role of mobility in students’ lives and educational trajectories. The participants invite us to engage with mobility, in its myriad forms, as something that is “enacted and experienced through the body” (Cresswell, 2010, p. 20) – i.e., something that might involve fatigue, discomfort, boredom, fear, relief, gratitude, uncertainty, and so on – and to consider the immediate and long-term implications for the “fragile, aged, gendered, racialized bodies … [that] encounter other bodies, objects and the physical world multi-sensuously” in any given experience of mobility (Büscher & Urry, 2009, p. 102). Future research might focus on the impact of different experiences of mobility and immobility for students positioned differently with respect to the border, such as undocumented students in U.S. high schools and universities. Recent scholarship emphasizes how the policing of immigrant minorities both constrains mobility and leads to the emergence of alternate forms of mobility (Stuesse & Coleman, 2014); exploring this issue among undocumented students and student recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) would deepen our understanding of the role of mobilities in students’ transnational worlds.

Understanding students’ mobility also requires us to look carefully at their practices of place-making and the associated effects on their identities. Border-crossing was, among other things, an opportunity for the participants to “construct emotional geographies” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 216) through which they sought to make sense of their relationships to people, events, and places on both sides of the border. As students’ patterns of mobility shifted over the course of their lives and college careers, they created and traversed a wide range of emotional geographies. This came at a significant price, for some, but also gave them the opportunity to focus the cosmopolitan vision that, I have argued, was so central to their sense of who they were.

**Endnotes**

While participants’ names are pseudonyms, which the participants chose themselves, our research team judged it important to use the real name of the university and border cities where the research was conducted, because of the specific character and history of the Matamoros-Brownsville area (as opposed to other border cities in South Texas and elsewhere in the Southwest with very different geographies, histories, and sociopolitical contexts). We asked for and received permission from the university’s Institutional Review Board to use the name of the university. Participants were made aware via the informed consent documents that the university’s real name would be used and that they might be more identifiable as a result.

2 Unfortunately, circumstances prevented the undergraduate researchers from working on the data analysis and write-up, though they were invited to do so and have continued to provide useful feedback, which I gratefully acknowledge here. [Name] graduated and began working elsewhere in Texas as a (rather overwhelmed) bilingual elementary teacher, [name] went abroad for her junior year before returning to the university to finish her degree, and I left UTB for [current institution] soon after concluding data collection for the project.

3 Araís may seem to have plucked Minnesota and Canada out of thin air, but the Rio Grande Valley is a destination for significant numbers of “Winter Texans” or “snowbirds” (part-time senior-citizen residents) from the Upper Midwest and Canada.

REFERENCES

Alvarez, R. (2012). Borders and bridges: Exploring a new conceptual architecture for (U.S.–Mexico) border studies. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, *17*(1), 24-40.

Appiah, K. A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers.* New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company.

Araujo, B., & de la Piedra, M. T. (2013). Violence on the U.S.–Mexico border and the capital students use in response. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, *26*(3), 263-278.

Balibar, E. (2004). *We, the people of Europe? Reflections on transnational citizenship.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Beck, U., & Grande, E. (2010). Varieties of second modernity: The cosmopolitan turn in social and political theory and research. *British Journal of Sociology 61*(3), 409-443.

Bejarano, C. (2010). *Border rootedness* as transformative resistance: Youth overcoming violence and inspection in a U.S.-Mexico border region. *Children’s Geographies 8*(4), 391-399.

Büscher, M., & Urry, J. (2009). Mobile methods and the empirical. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *12*(1), 99-116.

Byram, M. (2003). On being bicultural and intercultural. In G. Alred, M. Byram & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Intercultural experience and education* (pp. 50-66). Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.

Charmaz, K. (2003). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 249-291). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Clifford, J. (2012). Feeling historical. *Cultural Anthropology*, *27*(3), 417-426.

Conradson, D., & McKay, D. (2007). Translocal subjectivities: mobility, connection, emotion. *Mobilities*, *2*(2), 167-174.

Correa-Cabrera, G. (2014). Violence on the “forgotten” border: Mexico's drug war, the state, and the paramilitarization of organized crime in Tamaulipas in a “New Democratic Era”. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, *29*(4), 419-433.

Cresswell, T. (2010). Towards a politics of mobility. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 28,* 17-31.

Cresswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into practice*, *39*(3), 124-130.

de la Piedra, M. T., & Guerra, J. C. (2012). The literacy practices of transfronterizos in a multilingual world. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *15*(6), 627-634.

Dorsey, M. E., & Díaz‐Barriga, M. (2015). The Constitution Free Zone in the United States: Law and life in a state of carcelment. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, *38*(2), 204-225.

Duany, J. (2000). Nation on the move: The construction of cultural identities in Puerto Rico and the diaspora. *American Ethnologist*, *27*(1), 5-30.

Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Enriquez, J. G. (2011). Tug‐o‐where: Situating Mobilities of Learning (T) here. *Learning, Media and Technology*, *36*(1), 39-53.

Fenwick, T., Edwards, R., & Sawchuk, P. (2011). *Emerging approaches to educational research: Tracing the sociomaterial.* London and New York: Routledge.

Getrich, C. (2013). “Too bad I’m not an obvious citizen”: The effects of racialized U.S. immigration enforcement practices on second-generation Mexican youth. *Latino Studies 11*(4), 462-482.

González, N., Griego-Jones, T., Martínez-Briseño, Y. M., & Zavala, E. M. (2012). Estudiantes trasnacionales dentro de flujos globales. Una perspectiva teórica. In G. C. Valdéz Gardea (Ed.), *Movilización, migración y retorno de la niñez migrante. Una mirada antropológica* (pp. 41-74). Hermosillo, MX: El Colegio de Sonora, Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa.

Hamann, E. T., & Zúñiga, V. (2011). Schooling and the everyday ruptures transnational children encounter in the United States and Mexico. In C. Coe, R. R. Reynolds, D. A. Boehm, J. M. Hess, & H. Rae-Espinoza (Eds.), *Everyday ruptures: Children, youth, and migration in global perspective* (pp. 141-160). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Heyl, B. S. (2001). Ethnographic interviewing. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland, & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography* (pp. 369-383). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Heyman, J. M. (1998). State effects on labor exploitation: The INS and undocumented immigrants at the Mexico-United States border. *Critique of Anthropology*, *18*(2), 157-180.

Hockey, J., & Forsey, M. (2012). Ethnography is not participant observation: Reflections on the interview as participatory qualitative research. In J. Skinner (Ed.), *The interview: An ethnographic approach* (pp. 69-87). London and New York: Berg.

Hornberger, N. H. (2000). Bilingual education policy and practice in the Andes: Ideological paradox and intercultural possibility. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *31*(2), 173-201.

Hull, G. A., Stornaiuolo, A., & Sahni, U. (2010). Cultural citizenship and cosmopolitan practice: Global youth communicate online. *English Education*, *42*(4), 331-367.

Ingold, T. (2014). That’s enough about ethnography! *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 4*(1), 383-395.

Konrad, V., & Nicol, H. (2011). Border culture, the boundary between Canada and the United States of America, and the advancement of borderlands theory. *Geopolitics 16,* 70-90.

Kral, M. J. (2014). The relational motif in participatory qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 20*(2), 144-150.

Leander, K. M., Phillips, N. C., & Taylor, K. H. (2010). The changing social spaces of learning: Mapping new mobilities. *Review of research in education*, *34*(1), 329-394.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Martínez, O. (1994). *Border people: Life and society in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Méndez, Z. Y., & Staudt, K. (2013). Transnationalism at the border: Students’ experiences in border schools. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *26*(3), 257-262.

Mignolo, W. (2000). The many faces of cosmo-polis: Border thinking and critical cosmopolitanism. *Public Culture*, *12*(3), 721-748.

Nyers, P. (2003). Abject cosmopolitanism: The politics of protection in the anti-deportation movement. *Third world quarterly*, *24*(6), 1069-1093.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pollock, S., Bhabha, H. K., Breckenridge, C. A., & Chakrabarty, D. (2002). Cosmopolitanisms. In Breckenridge, C. A., Pollock, S., Bhabha, H. K., & Chakrabarty, D. (Eds.), *Cosmopolitanism* (pp. 1-14). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

QSR International Pty Ltd. (2014). NVivo qualitative data analysis Software. Version 10.

Rabinow, P. (1986). Representations are social facts: Modernity and post-modernity in anthropology. In J. Clifford & G. Marcus (Eds.), *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography* (pp. 234-261). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Relaño Pastor, A. M. (2007). On border identities: “Transfronterizo” students in San Diego. *Diskurs Kindheits- und Jugendforschung Heft, 3*(2), 263-277

Robbins, B. (1993). Comparative cosmopolitanism. *Social Text 31/32,* 169-186.

Rumford, C. (2008). Introduction: Citizens and borderwork in Europe. *Space and Polity*, *12*(1), 1-12.

Rumford, C. (2014). *Cosmopolitan borders*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sánchez, P. (2007). Urban immigrant students: How transnationalism shapes their world learning. *The Urban Review*, *39*(5), 489-517.

Sánchez, P., & Machado-Casas, M. (2009). At the intersection of transnationalism, Latina/o immigrants, and education. *The High School Journal*, *92*(4), 3-15.

Schensul, S. L., Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, M. D. (1999). *Essential ethnographic methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires.* Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman Altamira.

Sellar, S., & Gale, T. (2011). Mobility, aspiration, voice: A new structure of feeling for student equity in higher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, *52*(2), 115-134.

Sheller, M., & Urry, J. (2006). The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning A*, *38*(2), 207-226.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stuesse, A., & Coleman, M. (2014). Automobility, immobility, altermobility: Surviving and resisting the intensification of immigrant policing. *City & Society*, *26*(1), 51-72.

Suárez-Orozco, M. M., Darbes, T., Dias, S. I., & Sutin, M. (2011). Migrations and schooling. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *40*, 311-328.

Vasudevan, L. M. (2014). Multimodal cosmopolitanism: Cultivating belonging in everyday moments with youth. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *44*(1), 45-67.

Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism.* London and New York: Routledge.

Villenas, S. A. (2009). Knowing and unknowing transnational Latino lives in teacher education: At the intersection of educational research and the Latino humanities. *The High School Journal*, *92*(4), 129-136.

Wahlström, N. (2014). Toward a conceptual framework for understanding cosmopolitanism on the ground. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *44*(1), 113-132.

Warriner, D. S. (2008). Transnational literacies: Immigration, language learning, and identity. *Linguistics and Education*, *18*(3), 201-214.

Zentella, A. C. (1996). The “Chiquitafication” of U.S. Latinos and their languages, or why we need an anthropolitical linguistics. In *SALSA III: Proceedings of the Symposium on Language and Society* (pp. 1-18). Austin: Texas Linguistic Forum.

Zentella, A. C. (2012). “Socials,” “Poch@s,” “Normals,” et al.: School networks and linguistic capital of high school students on the Tijuana-San Diego border. Paper presented at the 2nd annual Workshop on Race, Ethnicity and Language in Schools, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 1. Focal Study Participants and Patterns of Cross-Border Mobility, Past and Present | | | | | | | | | |
| **Name** | **Sex** | **Birthplace** | **Place of residence** | **Age** | **Major** | **Level** | **Cross-border mobility (past)** | **Cross-border mobility (present)** | **Change in mobility**  **over time** |
| Aracely | F | San Fernando, Tamps. | Matamoros, Tamps. | 25 | Special Education | Graduate | 1x weekly [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] for English classes from age 8; 5 days/week to attend Catholic high school in U.S. in 10th grade | Daily [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] (since 2008 – attends university in U.S. but lives in Mexico); however, has been staying more often with relatives in U.S. | Crosses somewhat less frequently, since very recently, because of ICE harassment at border re: work authorization |
| Ana | F | Brownsville, TX  (grew up in Matamoros, Tamps.) | Matamoros, Tamps. | 26 | Biology | Recent graduate  (undergraduate degree) | Moved from Mex. to U.S. to attend high school (lived with brother); weekly (?) visits to parents in Mexico. Lived on both sides of border at different times during university education; crossed between 1x-5x weekly (?). | 5 days/week [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] (lives in Mexico but has continued working at university after graduation) | Crosses more frequently. Mode of crossing has changed from walking to car; takes less time. |
| Angela | F | Brownsville, TX  (grew up in Matamoros, Tamps.) | Matamoros, Tamps. | 32 | Educational  Technology | Graduate | 1x-2x weekly (to go shopping, go to restaurants, visit family) – from childhood (lived in Matamoros w/parents) to beginning of graduate study | 4 days/week (attends university in U.S. but lives in Mexico) | Crosses more frequently and spends more time in U.S. |
| Yu | M | Matamoros, Tamps. | Matamoros, Tamps. | 20 | Mathematics | Undergraduate | Moved from Mex. to U.S. to attend elementary school (lived with relatives); Moved from U.S. to Mex. to finish elementary school (because of parental concerns about Spanish language loss); Attended middle/high school in U.S. but continued living in Mexico – crossed 5 days/week | 5 days/week (attends university in U.S. but lives in Mexico) | Crosses roughly the same number of days/week, but now crosses only 1x/day (previously, would sometimes cross multiple times per day) |
| Jessica | F | Matamoros, Tamps. | Matamoros, Tamps. | 18 | Bilingual Education  (Elementary) | Undergraduate | Occasional visits [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] to go shopping during childhood | 5 days/week, 2x/day  (attends university in U.S. but lives in Mexico) | Crosses more frequently; spends more time in U.S. |
| Tina | F | Matamoros, Tamps. | Matamoros, Tamps. | 22 | Bilingual Education  (Elementary) | Undergraduate | 1x weekly (usually Sunday) [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] to go shopping during childhood | Around 7 days/week (attends university in U.S. but lives in Mexico) | Crosses more frequently; spends more time in U.S. |
| Sara | F | Matamoros, Tamps. | Brownsville, TX | 21 | Accounting | Undergraduate | 1x weekly during childhood [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] (to visit father’s family in Brownsville); began attending university in U.S. while living in Matamoros. Crossed 5 days/week during first two years, then moved to U.S. | 1x weekly [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] (to visit parents in Matamoros) | Crosses less frequently than when she started at university |
| Maria | F | Valle Hermoso, Tamps. | Brownsville, TX | 21 | Marketing | Undergraduate | Occasional visits [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] to go shopping from age of 9 | 1x to 2x weekly [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] to visit friends in Matamoros; 1x monthly to visit family in Valle Hermoso | Crosses with roughly the same frequency, but now spends majority of time in U.S.; previously, spent majority of time in Mexico |
| Lucy | F | Matamoros, Tamps. | Brownsville, TX | 24 | International  Business | Recent graduate  (undergraduate degree) | 1x weekly [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] to go shopping during childhood; began attending university in U.S. while living in Matamoros. Crossed 5 days/week during first year, then moved to U.S. | 2x weekly [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] to visit parents in Matamoros | Crosses less frequently than when she started at university |
| Isaias | M | Tampico, Tamps. | Brownsville, TX | 26 | Kinesiology | Undergraduate | Did not cross as a child. Began attending university in U.S. (athletic scholarship) while living in Matamoros. Crossed 5 days/week during first semester, then moved to U.S. | 3x/month [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] (2 shopping trips to Matamoros + 1 visit to family in Tampico) | Crosses less frequently than when he started at university |
| Alex | M | Brownsville, TX  (grew up in Matamoros, Tamps.) | Brownsville, TX | 22 | Kinesiology/ Spanish | Undergraduate | Crossed 2-3x weekly [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] as a child to go shopping, eat at restaurants. Began attending university in U.S. while living in Matamoros. Crossed 5-6x weekly [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] during first two years at university. | 1x to 2x weekly [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] to spend weekends with parents in Matamoros. (Siblings now live in Brownsville). | Crosses less frequently than when he started at university |
| Pablo | M | Brownsville, TX  (grew up in both countries) | Brownsville, TX | 28 | Kinesiology | Undergraduate | Lived in Matamoros until Pre-K; spent rest of childhood primarily in Brownsville but crossed regularly and spent weeks at a time with relatives on both sides. Around 2010-11, crossed @3-4 days/week (to visit girlfriend in Matamoros) | Occasionally [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] (@2x monthly – to visit family, attend celebrations, take friend to dentist) | Crosses less frequently |
| Mary | F | Brownsville, TX  (grew up in both countries) | Brownsville, TX | 24 | Bilingual Education  (Elementary) | Undergraduate | Lived in Matamoros until age 8 but crossed [Mex. 🡪 U.S.] 5 days/week (attended daycare in U.S.; parents worked in U.S.). After moving to U.S., crossed [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] 1x/weekly to visit family in Mexico. Stopped crossing @2008 because of violence. | Has resumed crossing “frequently” to visit family – 1x weekly? | Crosses less frequently than as a child but more frequently than from 2008-2014 |
| Araís | F | Brownsville, TX  (grew up in Ciudad Juárez, Chih. and Matamoros, Tamps.) | Brownsville, TX | 22 | Bilingual Education  (Elementary) | Undergraduate | Lived in Mexico until 5th grade, then moved to Brownsville to attend elementary school (lived with relatives). Crossed 1x/weekly to visit parents. Parents subsequently moved to Brownsville. | Crosses occasionally [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] (@2x monthly?). Most family members have moved to U.S. and family gatherings take place in U.S. | Crosses less frequently |
| Cristina | F | Brownsville, TX | Brownsville, TX | 22 | Psychology | Undergraduate | Crossed [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] “much more” (multiple times/month?) as a child to spend time with family. Stopped crossing entirely because of violence in 11th grade (@2010) | Crosses [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] @1x every two months. Started crossing again to spend time with boyfriend’s family and friends during second year at university. | Crosses less frequently than as a child but more frequently than from 2010-2013 |
| Max | M | Brownsville, TX  (grew up in both countries) | Matamoros, Tamps./  Brownsville, TX | 35 | Special Education  (Diagnostician) | Graduate | Lived in Matamoros until @ age 4; moved to U.S. to start school. Spent weekends, summers, and some weekdays in Mexico during school years. Crossed less frequently (@1x/monthly) from 2008-2010. | Crosses 3-4x/weekly. Resumed crossing [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] regularly because wife is a Mexican national and family now divides time between countries. | Crosses less frequently than as a child but more frequently than from 2008-2010. |

**Participant sub-groups:** [white] = Live in Mexico, attend university in U.S.; [light gray] = Grew up/attended school mostly in Mexico, moved to U.S. for university; [dark gray] = Grew up/attended school mostly in U.S., cross border on a regular basis.

[Mex. 🡪 U.S.] or [U.S. 🡪 Mex.] indicates initial trip direction during specific points in participants’ lives